



ISIDRA

WILLIS · STEELL

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ISIDRA

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BY

WILLIS STEELL



BOSTON

TICKNOR AND COMPANY

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1883

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To the MEXICAN MINING SYNDICATE, but for which he would never have been a millionaire in fancy, and which, by constantly drawing upon him to pay for machinery that broke down, or would not work, or too greedily ate up costly fuel, finally drew him to Mexico, where, in her vegetable *cosmos* and delicious skies, he found the Aztec's true gold and silver;—to that abused speculative company this book is affectionately dedicated by the author.

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ISIDRA.

CHAPTER I.

SEÑOR QUERRARO.

ON a bright October morning in the year 1864, a party of three people were riding along a rugged road which crosses the fertile plain of Morelia and ascends the hills with many long loops and curves. Though the view behind them was enchanting, the landscape through which these people passed offered such a beautiful panorama of slanting lights and sailing shadows that they had not time to admire distant glimpses of vanishing Morelia. Frequently the shadows closed in upon them as they entered a deep barranca, till it seemed the hills had swelled into mountains, and at times the valley, widening suddenly,

stretched at their feet, bordered by a row of undulating foot-hills covered with a carpet of grass like a terrace. Rarely, at such times, they saw a few cultivated squares of earth, bending with wheat ripe from the rainy season, demarked from the surrounding wildness by rows of towering magueys. Yet, the uncultivated spaces were so charming in their way, being covered with bright yellow acacias, and other sweet-smelling and flowering bush, that one did not miss the evidences of activity so much as the agents of it. Such a sweet landscape needed figures; in their absence, one was oppressed by the consciousness of abstracted human interest, and felt that he was living through an unnatural hour. In this country, made for the songs of women, the calls of laborers, the lowing of cattle, the travellers felt unreasonably impatient because they heard merely the voices of nature.

It is true that the equestrians now and then caught sight of a half-ruined cottage,

covertly peeping out from behind a knoll on the hill-slope, or by the road-side a willow hut, almost smothered by the embracing arms of roses, sweet-peas, and carnations, hidden in the rampant vegetation, yet most openly revealed by its flaunting bloom. If a more pretentious rancho came to view, the long stretch of untilled fields back of it, feebly kept in design by crumbling walls, baring their seedless furrows in despairing barrenness to the sun wherever the rank growth of cacti had not absolutely reclaimed them to barbarism, showed more plainly the curse of desolation than the oriental squalor of the smaller huts just passed. The first curve in the steep trail after they had begun to ascend the mountain proper brought in sight a group of deserted adobe cottages, blackened and roofless, their battered walls crumbling into mortar heaps. The travellers drew rein to look at this ruined village.

Ruins can never be so insignificant as to

awaken no emotion, at least, the poor one of curiosity. They are apt to engender in mankind feelings more poignant than the decaying stones of a grave-yard. Below the latter lie the dead, unmindful and unminded, but the former inhabitants of a deserted village may be living, and, if so, where and how? Without asking this question, if it occurred to them, the equestrians set their horses in motion, and a turn in the ascending trail soon left the abandoned huts behind.

The road forward was difficult; full of stones, boulders, and pitch-holes, in places almost impassable. But in proportion to the difficulty of the way increased the beauty of their surroundings. The mountain, undenuded of its forests by the improvident Spaniards, to whom Michoacan was ever a limited Paradise, showed trees of every variety, cast together as by a careless hand; their foliage, of every tint from perpetual yellow to perpetual green and

purple, mingled in the most surprising way. The prickly-pear shot its unwelcome arms upward to embrace the india-rubber plant; the fluted column of the organ-cactus towered up to the height of sixty feet, like a patriarch amidst his unnumbered family, their grotesque forms wandering everywhere, brightened with motley; pink, yellow, and red gold. Irregular clumps of acacia and sweet-smelling broom concealed the path, and to this fantastically colored picture the dark firs provided a rich background. A mysterious fragrance, compounded of the scents of all these shrubs and trees, breathed about the travellers; an aromatic perfume, which exhilarated and saddened, for it worked subtly to awaken their senses to appreciate the season, while it stimulated their hearts to cleanse themselves of bitterness, and their thoughts to turn tenderly to the past.

That Señor Querraro felt the stirring of this mysterious agent, he manifested later;

but his daughter, who was marvelling almost to tears at the wonderful beauty of the mountain, stealing a look at her father, to discover if he too acknowledged its tender charm, saw that his face was composed and stern. She sighed; needlessly, it would seem, for she had never seen it otherwise.

It was a face which in some points resembled that of Julius Cæsar: the same brow, rather high than capacious; the same nose, with a line furrowed in it that ran parallel with the line of the nostril; and the same small and regular mouth, with rather thick lips. The chin was cleft and stood out abruptly. His black eyes, that would have glanced fiercely if they had been restless, revolved slowly, and gave a look of kindness but of extraordinary keenness and brilliancy. The hair, of an intense black, with here and there a white thread, covered a square skull. Señor Querraro, a man of tall stature, was dressed in a garb which would

have been called rich in Europe, but which in Mexico, where the sun did not rise with more splendor of equipment than the Caballeros of that period, was severely plain. This distinction of dress marked him among his compatriots for a man apart. Born on the soil, he was yet too true a Spaniard to be classed among the Creoles, while the same accident operated to prohibit him from the privileges of that class — one-thirtieth the number of the former — of pure Castilian blood and natives of Europe with whom the mother country Spain had surrounded her viceroy to add substance to the shadow. A similar isolated position had been his father's, an emigré of advanced liberalism. Perhaps the son's position will be best explained by describing that occupied by Señor Querraro, pádre.

That man, by nature an ardent republican, eagerly embraced the cause of popular rights during the closing storms of the Colonial period, but he was universally mis-

trusted. To doubt is Mexican, and three hundred years of oppression had double-locked the door of their confidence to Spanish colonists. Señor Querraro was one of these, whom the Indians call Gatzopins, or centaurs, a word which may be traced back to the old idea that Spanish horses and men were one animal. His denial that he belonged to this party was admired as magnificent duplicity. But the year 1808 gave him an opportunity to act this disavowal. He leagued with the Creoles against the Gachupines, as the word had come to be written, who had seized Ferdinand's viceroy for reading the decree of the council of Indies, signed by that monarch, commanding their Mexican colony to obey Napoleon's brother and puppet. In the struggle, the Gachupines, those creatures of an absolute monarchy, approved of the measure which practically annihilated them, but the Creoles, in their intense loyalty, publicly burned Ferdinand's enforced proclamation.

One fatal defect prevented Señor Querraro from being welcomed with acclamation to the ranks of the Creoles. His was judged to be an act of self-preservation. The event proved loss to the old Spaniards and multiplication of the Creoles' special privileges. Señor Querraro had abandoned a sinking ship. More than this, his ideas were so advanced as to frighten them; he was a patriot with a just conception of Mexico's possibilities, while the narrow Creoles saw not an inch ahead of their noses. They abhorred the sentiment of republicanism, but they were determined to put down those odious class distinctions by which so long they had been debarred from taking their rightful place in the government councils. They were dissatisfied with persons, not with principles, and insisted that natives of the country should have an equal share with foreigners in its management. By natives they meant their own class; they joined with the

Gachupines in remorselessly enslaving the Indians, true natives of the country.

Insensibly, Señor Querraro imbued the Creoles with truer notions of liberty, but how his work was done, and how it was cut short by death, would be an account which it is unnecessary to separate from the facts of history; he never became fully trusted or believed in, which is the fact to be insisted on here. There are beings who die after reflecting the best and grandest in the moral universe, without finding the means of manifesting their truth to others. Señor Querraro died without impressing his true character on but one of all the people who associated with him.

That person was his son. To him descended an inheritance of patriotism and unpopularity. The son's life is the counterpart of the father's. Nor had the situation of Mexico materially changed. True, the war to which he was born was a war for Mexican independence, but the same vary-

ing and confusing shades of opinion sullied the one grand central idea. The second Querraro encountered the same difficulties that beset his father, whose enemies had bequeathed hatred and distrust to their children, as he had transmitted patriotism. Outside of a group of personal adherents there was not one man who confided and believed in him except, to some extent, the Indian President, Benito Juarez. In consequence of this corroding distrust, his had been a strange and sad life. He had done his duty well and loyally, he had immolated foes and friends alike on the stern altar of country during his governorship of Michoacan, but he had never been able to rouse personal regard and enthusiasm among any large body of Liberals, who marched all kinds and grades; Creoles and Indians, priest and layman, monarchist and republican, united by one bond only,—“Death to foreigners and independence for Mexico!” The Clericals distrusted him

though he was a stanch Catholic; the Creoles hated him because he had descended from a Gachupine; the Indians feared him because he had put to death so many of their bravos, the savage banditti.

At the commencement of the war of the Intervention, Señor Querraro was forced out of public office, and his enemies took advantage of his private helplessness to avenge themselves upon him. They instigated the frightened and about-to-scatter native army to throw him into prison on the landing of the French. President Juarez' personal efforts saved him from death, and set him free; but whatever he did for his country, henceforth, must be done covertly.

Belonging to the class of cold and reserved men whose spirit is humiliated at the very thought of proffering motives or explanations of conduct, we have not far to seek the reason of his unpopularity and friendlessness. And yet his life was so

pure, his course so open, that it seems strange his compatriots gave him no credit for disinterested patriotism. His personality, too, and his reputation for unflinching integrity, procured for him an involuntary advantage, which they were unwilling to forgive. Such petty considerations are wont to fade away in national crises; but for a reason why they did not in this case disappear it is enough to say the country was Mexico.

Señor Querraro rode onward in silence, turning his head neither to the left nor right. His children lost their reserve in the freedom of the mountain; Benito, a boy of fifteen years, continually spurred his horse to pursue a squirrel, or halted him to observe the lazy escape of the venomous heloderm, or lagged behind to gaze at the steep road they had ascended. In these merry excursions his sister frequently joined him, and her gay laugh accompanied his in its rolling progress down

the gorges; but she returned first, and then her lovely countenance resumed its expression of seriousness, and she rode at a footpace by her father's side.

The road became wider and more level, and at last they halted on an upland which turned round the edge of a high, bare summit, and, itself hemmed in by naked rocks, stretched below this peak and formed a broad irregular terrace. Below it lay the lovely valley of Morelia and a second range of guardian mountains on the southern side. The sunbeams poured impetuously down upon the domes and towers of the city, till it could scarcely be seen for the haze of light, but resembled a vast mound of gold set in the brown shadows cast by tall yuccas, magueys, and masses of dark leaves.

"Here we will breakfast," said Señor Querraro, dismounting and lifting a pocket from his saddle. They ate in silence save for an affectionate word that Isidra occasionally gave to her brother.

When they had finished, "Come here, Benito," said Señor Querraro, leading his son to the edge of the upland; "look upon that valley, and tell me what you see. I was younger than you are when I first stood here, and even then war hovered over it like a cloud. In all my life its shadow has never lifted. But when Mexico warred on Mexico, the sun had power to blow its particles into a haze; the people fought, it is true, but they labored also. Then great fields of brown earth, ready for the seed, or newly sown, were tilled as finely as garden-mould, or vast acres of wheat and barley smiled green and prosperous in the sun. Now, all is desolation, that generous nature makes beautiful, but desolation still. Untilled fields, broken hedges, scattered cattle, idle laborers, these are the things I bring you to see. In the city, life goes on; market-places open, people chatter and buy; their chains are riveted without their knowledge. Uncitizenizing

goes forward unperceived. In the country there are no deceptions. Did you mark that ruined village, those concealed cottages? Did you number the leperos whom we passed on our way to the gate? Did you shrink when the idle and discontented laborers stared at us with scowls of hatred?"

"What does it matter if the men without reason hate us, father? They are Indians."

"Indians! that is not the word to scorn, Benito. It is a prouder title than hidalgo. Indians are Mexicans."

"But not rulers, my father. We Spanish rule them."

"Learn to know who you are, son," said Señor Querraro, coldly. "Your sister has sown badly, or the ground is full of stones. I will cast them out. You are old enough to learn politics, and I need your help."

"My father," said the deep voice of Isidra in his ear, "must it be so? Benito

is still a child. Give him another year of ignorance. I will repay you."

"You are neglecting him, Isidra."

"No! Benito is haughty, but good and noble. Grant my wish. I will work harder to repay you; I will plot and toil, risk every danger; but he, no, no! I will not suffer any one, not even my father, to fill his days with stratagem, his nights with anxiety. Surely, he would do harm foolishly; Benito is so young, so frank. For what do you need him? Cannot I serve? Whatever you would have him do, and wherever you would send him, I will do it and I will go myself."

"Your sentiments are sisterly, Isidra," replied her father, "but with what warmth you express them! Well, so be it; I shall ask you to do that from which you will recoil; no, not I — Mexico!"

"Come," he added. "Let us mount and hasten. We have a visit to pay."

Absorbed in their own thoughts, — and

Benito now was as silent as father and daughter, — they took saddle, and, turning south, began to descend the mountain. They had not been riding long when Señor Querraro turned to the left and guided his horse over broken boulders and under dense black firs, till he reached a cottage built on the edge of a deep cañon. It was built of rough-hewed stone, thatched with dried cactus. They left their horses under the trees, and walked around the cottage to the door. As they crossed the threshold, they saw a sick man lying on a bed of maguey-fibre, which was the whole furniture of the place. The floor was simple earth. Never in the lives of Isidra and Benito had they seen such bareness, though they had often penetrated the huts of Indians, which are simple as caves. This one was like a cave without its mossy carpet and decorative trailing vines.

The sick man's eyes were closed. Señor Querraro took Benito's hand and led him to

the pallet. The boy shrank back. "He is an Indian," said his father, in a solemn voice, adding, "He is living."

"He will die," said a priest who stood in the door.

"Is it you, pádre?" asked Señor Querraro. "Look to your patient and then join us under the trees, where we will wait for you."

The pádre soon appeared.

"I wish to hear in full the story of this man's wrongs," said Señor Querraro. "If you have time, I beg you will relate it."

The priest looked an inquiry. Señor Querraro bowed his head.

"The tale is short, but infamous," began the pádre's passionless voice. "In this rude hut, hidden from prying eyes, dwelt a simple Indian, who never went in debt. In the valley beneath, Miguel was always fortunate to procure work, and he toiled bravely and long till he owned his little patch of ground and had built this cottage

— built it, Señorita, with his own hands. He had hoarded, besides, the amount of fee which the Church demands for marriage, for Miguel loved a pretty mestiza of the neighboring village, and Anita was as good and simple as she was pretty. Niños, I know, I married them. Ah, they were comfortable here; they were possessed of kindly, happy dispositions. Miguel dug in his little garden plot, toiled in the sun and planned for the future, until it was time to go home to Anita. And before he reached the head of the gorge he heard her voice singing a sweet song of welcome. 'Twas but the spring after the French had landed. Surely, Señorita, you heard their story. I had been in the mountains, and was returning, but, though the night drew on, my old bones ached wearily and I thought of the cottage here at the top of the cañon. Miguel and Anita would be glad to see the pádre and fortify his stomach and perhaps give him a lift homeward. It was no more

silent than usual when I came in sight of the cottage ; but a foreboding of some terrible trouble, I knew not what, filled my heart. I quickened my pace, scolding these fears which would come back, though I remembered it was a feast day, and what could happen to Anita with the stout Miguel at home to protect her ? When I was within hearing, I cried out, ‘ Anita ! ’ There was no answer but the echo. I ran to the house and burst through the door ; alas ! the worst had arrived ! I stood appalled at the scene that met my eyes. There on the floor, bound hand and foot, lay Miguel. The light of reason seemed to have left his eyes, which stared and rolled like a demon’s. Foam was on his lips, and from his throat came incoherent, choking sounds, while his body writhed like a serpent. I was nervous, my hand trembled ; but I found his knife and cut the ropes. As they fell, Miguel leaped to his feet with a fearful cry and rushed to the bed, where lay his wife,

apparently dead; her clothing was torn from her person, and her pallid face told of the awful experience through which she had passed. Miguel threw himself beside her on the bed, and, clasping her to his breast, cried out: '*Querida mia! Querida mia!*' Believing she was dead, the frantic man paced up and down like a savage animal, or rushed and clasped her in his arms with endearing expressions.

"I watched him for a while in agony, for I had no medicine for that soul. Besides, there was the tender Anita to consider. She was not dead, *Señorita*, alas! she was not dead. I detected signs of life, and took such means as were at hand to revive her. Miguel lifted her girlish figure in his arms as if she were a little baby, and carried her to and fro, covering her face with kisses. She lived through the night, and when Miguel had grown more calm he related what had transpired. A troop of the French, those red-legged men they call the '*Turks*,'

came here in the afternoon, lingering about, and destroying much, till Miguel's patient nature could endure no more. Anita counselled flight, and the pair had started; but the Turks called them back, and laid hands on Anita, and dragged her into the house. Then Miguel fought furiously but vainly. They bound him hand and foot, and in that fashion carried him into the cottage in turn. As he told this in hoarse whispers, I knew that hour of horror had burned into his soul.

“Well, she lived, as I tell you, she lived through the night without speaking a word; but in the morning Anita was gone!

“Since then the light of thought has never shone on Miguel's face. He will die to-day. I came here to administer the Viaticum to a man who since that awful hour has never sinned. I must go. *Pax vobiscum.*”

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN.

“HE is a holy man,” said Señor Querraro, when they rode away. “Would there had been in the Mexican priesthood more like him. Ride on, Benito, and enter Morelia in advance. Bring the coach and the mozo de caballos to wait for us near the Alameda. We will drive in the calzada at sundown.”

When father and daughter were alone, Señor Querraro again referred to the pádre.

“I am unjust to the robe,” he said; “Michoacan has been blessed by many pure, self-sacrificing fathers. In that respect, her fortune has been happier than other Mexican states. What would you think, Isidra, if the old pádre were forbidden to teach, on pain of banishment?”

“Think, Señor? This mountain would follow him into exile.”

“Yet, it is seriously discussed.”

“Incredible! Who talks of it? Not the Austrian?”

“No, it would precipitate his downfall. If you had read the last despatches, you would know, my daughter, what is preparing for Mexico. The triumph of the Liberal arms foreseen, our President has already mapped out his policy. He tells me what it is. I oppose it, but he little knows how bitterly I regret the necessity to oppose him.”

“What is his plan? Say it is not to resume the horrid work of destruction and confiscation?”

“Yes, he revives that sacrilegious scheme.”

“Which exiled him and cursed Mexico with the French and allies?”

“Yes, my daughter. The egg laid then is to be hatched. He will spawn the

scorpion. Hear what he intends, and judge if he is mad. He will close up the convents, monasteries, religious schools and hospitals, devote them to secular purposes, and banish from the country every priest and sister who taught and served therein. He will rob the Church of its property, buildings and lands, he will strip monk and priest of their ecclesiastical costume; Catholic worship will be permitted only with restrictions, and the officiating clergy will be tenants of the government. Even the ringing of our silver bells is to be regulated by law. Impious man! If he perseveres, I see a gulf yawning for Mexico, a bottomless gulf! I see the multitude protesting violently against the demolition of their sacred shrines. I see our people rising in the terrible wrath of calm natures to throw themselves upon the soldiers when they break with demoniac pleasure into the churches and convents, pulling down the sacred altars, defiling medals, rosaries, and

scapularies. I see the Liberal army divided, the two parts flinging themselves upon each other, and on that nameless day brother will destroy brother and son father. On that day, what we have gained in this war will be lost; the flag of liberty will be trampled, a false banner, underfoot; the ark of National Independence will be only so much added fuel to Mexico's funeral pyre. This people cannot live through a second frightful religious revolution."

"Go — go to Juarez, father," exclaimed Isidra. "Or, if you cannot go, send me. I will ask if he has forgotten that Hidalgo was a priest. You have told me Juarez is religious?"

"How can I say? He believes me to be a fanatic. Speaking calmly, I think he would sacrifice even his religion if it stood in the way of the standard of Independence. His vital maxim teaches that a wise administrative creed must contradict Catholic doctrine. If it were not a maxim with

him, I might rely on argument, but he will not listen : priests are immoral ; they hag-ride the people — they must go ! You find no reference here to the fundamental truth of what they preach, which he neither asserts nor denies. Unlike a wise man and true patriot, he refuses to consider steps to reform religious institutions along with secular, to base both on liberty and equality.

“There,” continued Señor Querraro, “Juarez and I part. I believe that our country’s safety is to be found in joining material with religious interests ; the government that is founded on no religious base cannot stand.

“Mexico,” he said, solemnly, “will find a perfect model of government by copying that of the Church. Not its perverted form as carried on by avaricious priests, who have fouled their hands with greed, but the true principle as it bubbles limpid at the source. What made of the Church a polit-

ical power? The superior intellect of its leaders, some say, and the weakness or willingness of the masses to be led. That is not the first answer. The Church continued to govern after men had grown wise and worldly, by the domination of two ideas — pillars on which it was reared, liberty and equality. Long before men knew the meaning of these words, the Church had built upon them; elections depended on them; pope, cardinal, bishop, priest gave expression to them. These ideas, my Isidra, have made modern civilization. Without them a new political system would be absolutely baseless.

“Juarez denies the existence of these ideas in the Church; he closes his eyes, and will not read the history of the marvellous work done for the world when the Church controlled the human intellect. Blindly he will discard a perfect idea because error has crept into its expression. There Juarez fails!

“This country requires a more powerful leader. It needs a wiser leader; one who would hesitate to make war on all its traditions, one who would have strength to forge into a strong chain new triumphs and old truths; one who, when he saw an example of good and perfect government, would lay hold of the necessary power and apply it. Juarez is not such a leader, but there lives a man who is. The triumph of the ideas of Juarez will lead to the ruin of Mexico and of the Liberals themselves. If—which God forbid!—Juarez and his party are, under the standard of the Republic, to strike down the fabric of the Church, against which they ignorantly rebel, his success will be at once followed by a struggle between the Republic and the masses. Mexico will be driven to a holy war—in which she will suffer a most ignominious death at the hands of the men who have freed her. The battle will be desperate and without quarter; out of the

dust no state will arise. Oh, my unhappy, bleeding country ! ”

“ Señor,” said the girl, fixing upon him her great, impenetrable eyes, “ the man who, you predict, will arise and oppose Juarez reads to me like a tyrant, snatching the reins of power and exacting blind obedience as his due. You forget the people, to whom you wish no ill. Rather than they should fall into the hands of such a leader, I would prefer to see them exterminated in a battle for their religion. At least, they would fall under the flag of Liberty and Reform.”

“ Words ! ” answered her father, coldly, “ Words merely ! uncomprehended words flung to the people as the symbols of revolt and the phrases of destruction.”

“ Alas ! my father ! You are ruthlessly pulling down what you have built. Do you not believe in patriotism ? ”

“ My creed may seem strange to you, my daughter, and even to contradict past con-

duct ; but it is the fruit of the catastrophes of our last fifty years.”

“Tell me, do you not believe in patriotism ?” she persisted.

“The emotions of patriotism,” replied Señor Querraro, in a measured tone, “are transient and of no more utility than were the seven colors of light before a divine hand mingled them into the strong white beam. So the elements of patriotism, love of country and liberty, scatter aimlessly unless united in one powerful hand. Mexico needs a man to gather up those rays and turn the compound — a prosperous beam — on her untilled fields and benighted people ; to comprehend the past, foresee the future, and act as directed by that double wisdom ; to be master first of himself, and next of the country, and to hold office only from a conviction of usefulness ; neither to fear nor trust ; to have the spirit of charity, but not the sentiment of friendship ; to keep silence over details

and discuss consequences,—in short, to rule the people with an absolute power and yet hold it by their consent.”

“You are speaking of a god,” said Isidra. “Where can Mexico find that leader?”

“Here,” said Señor Querraro, laying his hand on his heart; “here, in your father.”

Isidra said nothing. Her hands closed tightly over the reins; her heart leaped like a trout in a full stream.

“Between you and me, Isidra,” said her father, “there must be fullest confidence. I need your assistance, but I must reject it unless you trust me absolutely. Choose between Juarez and your father. I have long enough combated him with my pen; now I will see what virtue is in my sword. A counter-revolution is already concerted.”

“Father!”

“’Tis so. The Clericals are with me; half the army; in a month, the Republic without religion will exist only in Benito

Juarez' heart. It was a hard struggle to force myself to conspire against him, but the combat between us I disclaim, before Heaven, to be one for the possession of power."

"Oh, Señor, I tremble for your life!"

"I have done honorably; I pleaded for religion and lost my cause; now I fight for her and my country—it is impossible to separate them. When I failed, I trembled and turned coward, but not for my own life. Mexico's tears scalded me like the tears of a woman. I dreamed of hiding my eyes; I thought of exile. A physician without medicine to relieve her, I was about to go out of her sick-room and close the door behind me. Would you have me go?"

A red flush burned on Isidra's cheeks; her eyes shot forth ardent flames.

"My brave daughter!" said Señor Querraro, proudly, almost tenderly. "Now you know my position, and I depend on you

to assist me. To succeed, I must live, I must be free."

"How, Señor? I would die to serve you! How am I to assist you?"

"In good time, Isidra," answered her father, with a searching look into his daughter's eyes.

They were entering a paved village. Señor Querraro dismounted and held out his hand to Isidra. As he did so, an old man stooped down and began to gather the stones which strewed his path and to sweep it clean for his feet.

"Nay!" said the Señor, placing his hand on the old man's shoulder. "Lift up your head and discontinue that barbarous custom. I would have you respect me as a man. Follow us with the horses to the casa; we set out again immediately."

They rode in silence, and now at times Morelia lay directly beneath them and at times it was hidden behind the hills, as if the road were a wild thing and ever seek-

ing to escape to the rocks and fastnesses. Once when they were thus enclosed by boulders and virgin trees they saw a rude chapel reared near the wayside. Within lay the body of a man, and at its head knelt an aged woman, weeping and moaning aloud.

Señor Querraro called to her. She averted her face, but answered his questions.

“What is your grief, mother?”

“My son is dead.”

“Who was your son?”

“My son José — José Martínéz.”

Señor Querraro frowned. “I have heard of him,” he said. “I have heard also of his mother. So you are she — the good mother of a depraved son. I have not forgotten what they say of you — that you followed the army to Puebla and carried supplies through the enemy’s ranks into the beleaguered city. But what are you doing here? If you love your land, one brave

deed done for her will not content you. Dry your eyes, and come forth. I wish to send a message to your people."

"I can do nothing, Señor; I am old and tired. My son is dead."

"It is well. He was his country's foe. She has many who live, and few friends. She cannot spare you. Dry your eyes and obey."

"No, Señor, no!"

"You have other sons. Seek them and send them forth to battle for Mexico. Here is money; bury that carrion."

The woman lifted her hands as if to ward off the epithet, uttering a painful cry; she threw herself down on the floor, and rocked back and forth.

"He is my son! my son!"

They passed on, leaving her alone with her dead. Señor Querraro spoke, at length, in his accustomed cold voice.

"There," he said, "you see the weakness of nations. No woman is a true patriot."

A mother's love for her child is her real love. In this case it was thrown away on a man of cruel, mean, and revengeful blood. For ten years, José Martinéz has been the terror of this mountain-side. Gambler and robber, he despoiled the poorest natives without shame. He was the curse of travellers and farmers. The crosses of men and women who have fallen by this desperado's hand would make the stations of a Calvary. Yet, when he meets his merited doom, for he was executed at Soleidad, his mother — a brave and noble woman — mourns his taking-off."

"He was her son," said Isidra, softly.

"You, too!" exclaimed her father. "No nation can achieve greatness when but one-half of her inhabitants are citizens. The women of spindle and needle, with hearts filled by husband or son to the exclusion of the country, are a dead-weight against its progress. When men are up in arms and in the field, why should women sit at home

mourning their absence, or weeping because husbands and sons have been slain? Is not the native land for which husbands and sons are fighting equally their native land? Yet, mothers will hide their sons and withhold their husbands from going forth to battle for the state, when they should themselves gird on a sword and follow them to the field!

“There was once a nation, Lycurgus made its laws, which counted women among its citizens. Her girls were not taught to spin and embroider, but to wrestle with each other, to run, to throw the discus, to become as vigorous as their brothers, and like them to firmly uphold the state. Our own country might become another Sparta; one of the conditions exists: Mexican women are naturally hardy and inured to fatigue. What they lack is hardihood of spirit and freedom from the weakness of family love, so called. Then that woman we have left weeping would not weep, but offer praise

because a scourge to her country had been removed.

“The wax is here, but the moulder is not ready. When the day dawns that sees the daughters of our land equal to her sons, proud, honorable, heroically strong, united in friendship with men, but capable only of loving God, it will see Mexico free! That day I live for!”

Isidra listened to her father with astonishment. Her veins grew large as she listened.

“What do you mean?” she cried. “I cannot understand you. If my reason tells me you are right, my heart says as loudly you are mistaken. Yet, if you speak personally, if, as I conjecture, you are speaking thus to nerve me to my duty, why take such trouble? Do not fear that I care for life. I was born brave, for I am your daughter.”

“A sublime courage, a heroic courage, I require of you, Isidra,” said her father, in a strange voice. “At this moment I suffer

like the mother we have lately seen. The pity that reason denied her, that I refused to give her, I require for myself. We are approaching Morelia. I must speak at once. We have not spent the day in these hills for careless pleasure; what you have seen there has impressed on your soul more firmly, if it were necessary, the features of your country's enemies. Never forget who they are — the French and her own misguided sons. You also know, as well as I know myself, your father's perilous position. Nowhere save in the protection of the foreigner can he look for safety. But that would be the retreat of a base soul and a cowardly character. The laws of war have provided for this contingency: you shall go as my hostage to the French. This should not be, but my life and labor are necessary to Mexico — I say it with inflexible pride. Juarez himself, however bitterly offended, cannot deny it. Perhaps I may succeed in bringing him to reason. I hope

and will not despair. In the meantime, you shall find a friend. I will show him to you to-night."

"Father!"

"Fear not," he answered.

Benito greeted his sister with impatient queries. Why had they delayed so long? why had they sent him away so early? She embraced him tenderly and hid her troubled countenance in his hair, responding gently that they had been detained by a sad sight.

"Was it so sad as that we saw at the cañon, Isidra?" asked the lad, and added solemnly, "I mean never to speak to a Frenchman again. They are cruel and base, including the officers who permit such wickedness. But I will be sorry never again to bow to the wounded commandant."

"Whom do you mean?" Isidra asked, "I have never heard you speak of him before."

“No, it is a secret friendship,” said Benito, gravely.

The three were seated on the deep, wide cushions of the family carriage, that had just joined the throng of vehicles moving at a snail’s pace along the wide paved trottoir of the calzada. Isidra scarcely knew where she was : the noise of wheels, creaking harness and horses’ hoofs, rippling laughter and merry voices sounded like an accompaniment to the shrill cries of José’s mother, the priest’s dreary tale, and the words of her father, which kept recurring : — “ A sublime courage, a heroic courage, I require of you,” — “ You shall find a friend — ”

Benito caught his sister’s hand. “ Lean forward, and you can see him. Directly opposite, on the beautiful black Arab. Is he not primeroso ? ”

Isidra had a glimpse of a tall, young man who bestrode his black horse nobly. His eyes met hers. A warm rose flooded

her cheeks, which the next moment were cold as ice. Hastily withdrawing her head, she read her father's face with startled eyes.

CHAPTER III.

IN MORELIA.

MASS was over when Captain Paul d'Am-yot of the French forces, who had been quartered on sick leave in Morelia, entered the cathedral, where the daily battle between light and darkness was being sharply fought.

Night still held undisputed possession of the quarter near the great doors, and thither the clouds and shadows that veiled the aisles to left and right were fleeing as to their last fortress. But the painted window above the high altar glowed with the rosy light of dawn; and through it fell golden sparks upon the rods in the hands of two Indian boys, in white surplices, who moved about extinguishing the candles. The sun grew stronger, and the narrow

streams from the window spread into wide rivers of light, across which the smoke from the censers, that hung heavily after the service, drifted like cloudy rainbows; the shadows retreated still further, and day rushed triumphantly over the conquered territory, which by this time extended from the lowest depths of the chancel to the massive silver rails of the dark carved wooden coro.

There were some worshippers lingering about. A few women, haunting the dimmest corners, knelt on the cold floor, supporting their heads against the wall or on their hands. A few men, also, leant against the columns or crouched in a lifeless fashion on the low step of the coro. At the railing of a side altar, under a dome covered with Oriental mosaics, where hung the miracle-working picture of the Virgin, a group of Indians, with their broad, high-cheek-boned faces framed in matted tufts of black coarse hair, prayed as devoutly to

the picture as their ancestors formerly had prayed to Mexitl, Montezuma's war-god.

Captain d'Amyot took one enraptured look at the wondrous effect of sunrise in the cathedral, and turned back to the shadows, to search earnestly for a kneeling figure with its marble face set off against the graceful mantilla. At last he descried her praying in a little private chapel; thither he walked and stood with a beating heart until she rose and turned to depart. He met her at the gate of the iron railing.

"The Señor Commandant!" she exclaimed softly, but with a little start; "this is not the military mass, or have you taken to observing the rite daily?"

"The music tempted me," replied the captain, with a blush.

"Are there no singers at the barracks? When it was a convent—not long ago, you remember, it boasted a heavenly choir. But if you will permit me, Señor! I am already late. The church is quite empty."

“One moment, give me a moment! I came here to see you, chance no longer favors me, I —”

The maiden looked at the tall soldier before her, who stood with downcast eyes and a tongue that would not utter his thoughts. Her lips curved in a merry smile, but her eyes, dark, clear, and piercing eyes, never wandered from his face.

“I must go away,” Paul burst out, in rapid, agitated sentences. “I am ordered to San Juan. I must go away to-day. The place is important; it is the key of Mexico.”

“The key of Mexico!” she repeated, thoughtfully, and then added with a dazzling glance, “Then, you must be strong, Monsieur, and lock out all her enemies.”

“If I could be sure who are her enemies! Am I one of them, in your eyes?”

“It is not for me, Señor, a woman, to discuss such matters, or to set apart, on one

side and the other, the friends and enemies of my country."

"Nay, forgive me, Señorita, and instruct me. Since I first saw you — since that day — since my wound, I have thought much of this question. I am no politician, I am a soldier; but I swear to you my heart is not in this war!"

"Then, why engage in it, Señor Captain?" asked the maiden, with an undertone of mockery in her voice.

"'Tis true we occupy here a strange position," said the officer, talking rapidly, like a man who would hold another in ordinary conversation until he could formulate his deeper purpose — "The people treat us neither as friends nor enemies. Certainly we are not here as conquerors. We French represent a party, an opinion, a principle, that oppose another principle, opinion, and party. They tell me this has been Mexico's habitual state for fifty years. When our troops and the Liberals enter a

town by different gates, what is the course of the inhabitants? To espouse the cause of liberty and join against us would be a noble course. But no—they close their shops like philosophers, and open them again after the conflict, to sell to the victors, whichever party it may be!”

“Therefore you think there are no citizens in Mexico, no hearts that throb with their country’s. Oh, sir, there are! there are noble souls who pray and fight for her deliverance! You ask me what is this war? It is a war between the invader and the patriot.”

The girl’s face expressed a noble passion; her eyes were softly suffused for a moment, and then burned with a steadier fire. There was a pause, and then the gay smile came back upon her lips; her voice rang merrily again when she said, “But that is far from the subject—you were bidding me adieu. Farewell, then, and, enemy as you are, I wish you no greater harm than

the wound from which you have recovered."

"Señorita, I have not recovered!"

"No, is it so? You walk like a soldier again."

"That is not my wound. It is —"

"Yes, it is the migraine; Morelia is dull enough to give one of your nation a headache. It is the migraine."

"Mock me, but hear me, Señorita. I cannot go away without speaking. And pardon my rough words, for I cannot speak as your noble caballeros speak, nor put my meaning in their courtly phrases, I who have passed my life learning the harsh accents of camps. But I love you, I love you! Señorita, will you permit me to love you?"

Her eyes were downcast, and a light breeze of emotion fanned the feathery lashes.

"How can I prevent it if it is done?"

"And you — you will love me a little?"

“Ah, that is different !” She drew back, and a strange smile settled on her face. “Are you sure that you love me ?” she asked, accompanying the question by a ripple of laughter. “Listen, I know the song of your countrymen (forgive me for repeating it here, O holy mother of God !): —

“ ‘Alerte ! alerte ! prenez garde,
Pères, mères, car ce sont eux ;
Fermez, car la nina regarde
Voici venir —’

“It runs so, Señor. You came also and must amuse yourself. It is folly to say that you love me — you who do not know my father nor my father’s name. You do not even know my *grille* !”

“My heart has not asked me such questions. But it has much to say to you — ah, Señorita —”

“I also, Monsieur, have something to say to you. It is this — I am the daughter of Señor Querraro. Have you never heard of him ? Strange ! his name is everywhere.

Therefore, ask any one whom you may meet for Señor Querraro, and when you hear his answer, ask yourself if the daughter of that man could love her country's enemy."

"You shall not go like that! My faith, I am no enemy. I am serious — deadly serious; I will gladly give up this expedition, renounce the army, burn up my commission, resign, what you will!"

"A renegado? that would ill become you; but how we have wasted time — the church is empty. My last word, Señor!" She took a step towards him, and winged the arrow straight to his heart by way of her smiling eyes. "A renegado! I have one renegado for a lover. There is Prieto from the mountains. Prieto is or was a patriot. He swears that he will fulfil my every command. I despise Prieto, Señor Captain, but I could love him as easily as you."

Even as she spoke, her glance grew ten-

der and womanly, as if she regretted the bolt that was drawn with so sure an aim. But calling up a laugh, musical and careless, she turned the chapel gate and was gone. Captain d'Amyot remained in the church a long time, how long he was not conscious, looking at his wound as dumb animals look at theirs; only sensible that somehow the sun had gone out and that a fierce pain would follow this existing numbness. He went outside and sat down on a stone bench under the orange-trees of the Zocolo. The sun was now pouring down his strong, hot light on the stone-flagged square, and all the squalid denizens of the little capital were basking lazily in his rays. To-day, the usual number of idlers was reinforced by large numbers of short, thick-chested, and heavy-limbed Indians from the mountain-villages, who had come in because they knew that the monster bell which hangs in the large tower of the cathedral, and is so rarely sounded, would chime to

announce the departure of the Host on its journey to the convent-church in the Alameda. These provincials could not hope to emulate the idleness of a group of the tribe of Otomi, degenerate descendants of the warlike Aztecs, who lay, like a mass of offal and discarded rags, in the centre of the plaza, under the direct and scorching rays of the sun. They occupied the time by sauntering up and down under the arcades, where many little shops were open, offering for sale fruits, meats, and vegetables, gaudily painted pottery and pretty basket-work and mats. For fear of their proprietor, the village Indians dared not purchase any of this merchandise, but it satisfied them to assume the attitude of traffickers.

Near the cathedral portal, a dozen Mexican boys smoked and chattered, or, shaking off the inborn laziness that interfered largely with their games, they imitated the awkward movements of a company of

native soldiers who were drilling in the plaza. Mestizos and their women, whose complexions exhausted every shade of yellowish brown, were lingering patiently in front of a pulque-shop—the Daughter of the Sun, a drowsy wench, who had not yet commenced the labors of the day; now, and then, a couple of black-draped señoras sauntered across the square, with their skirts held high in one hand, and a fan, which supplied the place of a parasol, in the other; to these animated figures, a postman mounted on a sorry hack, and waiting patiently and lifelessly in front of a gate for some one to come and relieve him of the letters of the house, offered the national contrast in a manner to rival the sleeping bundle of filth in the middle of the Zocolo.

The aguadors (water-carriers), wearing huge leathern helmets and aprons, went slowly up and down the square, calling out in a croaking voice, not calculated to rec-

commend the freshness of their beverage, "Agua, agua!" followed by pulque-venders, who were better patronized, and to whose movements a hurry almost amounting to energy was lent by the chance to empty their pigskins before the Daughter of the Sun woke up.

At the sound of the great bell, activity that would have been idleness and repose that would have been death in a northern latitude ceased simultaneously while the music of a silver bell, rung by an attendant who went forward to announce the passing of the Host, brought every soul of the multitude upon his knees. The pulque-vender with the stopper still in his hand; the water-carrier in the act of filling a cup; boys and soldiers ceased from their military practice; even the sleeping Indians rose in their rags, and knelt again to honor the mystic gilded coach.

The man on the stone bench alone remained upright, seeing neither the cere-

mony nor the scowls cast upon him by the bigoted worshippers. He held in one hand the half of a stout cane, the other half of which lay at his feet; his eyes were bent on the ground, but they were turned inward. He dimly comprehended that when he awoke it would be to pass from torture to torture and from anguish to anguish, and therefore he indulged as long as possible in his present state of lethargic retrospection. By turning his head, he felt that he could see his future hung before him like an unlovely picture, but, contrary to his character of soldier, he hesitated, and fixed his eyes instead upon his past, though he found no consolation there.

Paul d'Amyot had lived to the age of thirty before falling in love—a Frenchman; an officer for ten years, who had been at Solferino, who had served in Algeria,—will it be believed? He had a valourous reputation, but, unlike the Knight of Malta, he had never dared to wear on his

free neck the yoke of woman. He was one of the characters which could only exist in that changing first half of the nineteenth century, in that peculiar school of war and conquest that Napoleon left as a legacy to France, when men inflamed with warlike zeal were obliged to turn their spears against some ignoble foe, in a half-savage corner of the world, because Europe afforded no field for spoils and honor; he descended from soldiers who perpetuated the memory and curse of the Emperor, and who gave their sons the training which they had themselves received, never realizing that it was fifty years behind the world. These men found their world on the battlefield, their life in the smoke of cannon. It was natural that they should ignore the ignominy of mercenary war.

To be born fifty years too late was Paul d'Amyot's misfortune. His studies at St. Cyr told him nothing of the changed temper of the times — there, awake and dream-

ing, he fought great conflicts for noble issues, fought by the side of the Conqueror. When he received his baptism of fire, no cynic was by to corrode his pride with the suspicion that the issue was ignoble. It was not long, however, before he began to chafe, before his own conscience became the cynic, and by the time he found himself in Africa he half despised his pursuit. Nothing for it, though, but to keep on, but the disparity between magnificent triumphs and petty purchased victories was never out of his mind. It made something of a hermit of him—to his brother officers he held himself reserved and enigmatical, and to women he turned a blank face absolutely.

If the younger officers talked of d'Amyot at the mess table, they adopted the tone that women use in discussing a man who has hidden his faults from the world—each of them had known a fellow-student like Paul, who had taken prizes at college and

emerged to lead a passionless and colorless life ; but wiser men, who wore a colonel's epaulets, judged differently. Their experience permitted them to read a glance or a word, let fall at a moment of danger, which revealed the secrets of his soul, and they knew that he would one day be the hero of a veritable romance, that when he met the right woman he would be sublimely in love, without the power of silencing his passions or to do either good or evil save at her bidding.

Hitherto, not one of the women whom he encountered during infrequent visits to Paris or Algiers (and many of them were willing to explain away the misunderstanding between him and society) was successful in attaching him to herself. He felt the need for none, so he fled before all. It had not seemed probable that his Mexican experience would present any new phases. So no one was astonished when, entering Cholula, at the head of his troop, he passed

without lifting his eyes to the balconies filled with beautiful young girls, rendered temptingly coquettish by the fan interposed as a screen. As in Arabia he had been blind to the voluptuous Fatima and her armlet, so in Mexico he walked by the tender Dolores and her fan without looking up.

His brother officers said of him : " He is not so true a soldier as his horse." They called him " Monsieur l'Abbé."

His men also, who worshipped him, as a French soldier is ready to worship a dashing captain, shook their heads over this failing. He was a novice, a *pudeur*, a *précieux*, something, in fact, which they could only describe with a multiplicity of shrugs and adjectives.

Otherwise, d'Amyot was the soldiers' darling — they had confidence in his courage, and could rely upon his strategic ability ; besides, he appealed to their pride by the skill with which he managed

sabre and musket — the proper tools of a common soldier. When the foot-soldiers saw this man mounted on his horse — an old companion, brought from the sands of Djebel-Amour, each one fancied that he saw his own ambition realized. Stories of his prowess were rife in the camp, but chance offered him a later opportunity to attach his men. It was at the siege of Puebla, when the streets of that city were closed by impassable barricades, and, to accomplish its surrender most quickly, the French, instead of attacking with their insufficient artillery the works in front, took each house singly, and so moved up, inch by inch, upon the enemy. Every day brought its own work, and at night the besiegers fortified themselves in the advanced position they had won.

Toward the close of one day, when a street had been well cleared, a company of Zouaves entered, at the point of the bayonet, a small house, far under the shelter

of the barricade. This success roused the Juaristas to fury. They burst out of cover like a hurricane. Their assault was so sudden that the French column, worn out by the engagements of a hot day, staggered and fell back. The drum beat the retreat. Only the Zouaves failed to hear it, in the din of battle that suddenly raged about the little fortress they had conquered, for the Mexicans had closed up and surrounded to the number of four battalions. Caged, the Zouaves maintained the unequal contest, sustaining their fire so resolutely that the wall and terrace of the house resembled a mane of flashes. The Mexican troops were eager to make an end of it; they hurled themselves upon the wall, like the sea upon a cliff. Ortéga ordered a surrender; the Zouaves replied with a volley, but in the rattle of musketry a trained ear would have read the exhaustion of cartridges and the acceptance of death.

Suddenly firing commenced on the Lib-

erals from the very redoubt they had carelessly abandoned. The Mexicans looked confused. The shots continued, and, leaving the prey, they turned to recover their former position. A shower of balls welcomed them; they pressed on faster and mounted the barricade with the ferocity of desperation.

Here was escape for the Zouaves! They defiled noiselessly into the street, and, stumbling over dead and wounded, gained the trenches, to clasp hands with their preservers, d'Amyot and a few volunteers, who had rescued them without disturbing the repose of the army.

Captain d'Amyot was wounded on this occasion, and, two days after the capitulation of Puebla, he exchanged to the staff of the marshal commandant, with headquarters at Morelia, where, it was expected, President Juarez would make his retreat from the capital.

That wound and a fever consequent to

the hot dusty journey from Puebla to Morelia were the means Destiny took to accomplish the regeneration of this man. He awoke on his sick-bed to a feeling of loss. Somebody had been with him, but she had gone before he had found out who she was or why she was here. He closed his eyes, and again that sense of close companionship! This movement of the soul came less and less frequently as he grew stronger. When he was entirely recovered, he hesitated for several days before going among his brother officers. He shrunk from their observation. Would they perceive anything altered about him? Without fully comprehending what had happened, he began to despise his former existence as colorless and incomplete; he asked himself questions about the profession of arms, which had never occurred to him before, and which troubled him now. It would be going too far to say that he thought seriously of abandoning the career of a soldier;

he still thirsted for action, but war in itself was not sufficient to content him. His spirit was open to other sentiments. He looked with perceiving eyes at the little maid who brought him fruits and cooling drinks from the *comedor*, and bent a pleased ear to the badinage which passed between her and his orderly. This might be merely the natural delight that convalescents take in common things. But Paul could not deceive himself—the change was too miraculous for his philosophy. He felt like a man who had ridden in a storm until his clothes and hair were charged with lightning, and Paul was, in truth, full of the stormy electricities of passion. Visions constantly passed before him of a beautiful woman; skin of snow gleamed out of the dusk like the milky way in heaven, velvety eyes shone upon him like stars. Paul dared not stretch out entreating arms, for fear that she would vanish. He lay breathless, and gazed with devouring eyes.

This dream he carefully concealed from his comrades, but it was necessary to be on his guard to prevent his face from expressing a certain sensuous interest in their idle talk, which formerly had nauseated him; he knew what sort of sympathy to expect from that quarter, and he believed that, if he had changed, it was not to grow like them. He wished to be alone, for it seemed that only in solitude would he be able to conquer this strange weakness; he wandered outside of the city and among its narrow streets, under the balconies that now possessed a tremulous charm for him. One day, as he was returning from a lonely ride, he entered the calzada, just before sundown, when all the little world of Morelia was taking the air, according to its wont. The spectacle presented a double procession of carriages at the sides and of horsemen in the centre. Promenaders strolled along a broad walk in front of a row of simple stone houses, with pretty

courts and flower-gardens, or rested on the high-backed stone benches that line each side of the drive. D'Amyot fell in behind the cavaliers, and his eyes roved aimlessly over the cumbrous family coaches of the Mexican aristocracy, in the depths of which the young girls hide themselves, and only lean forward when a favored caballero is passing.

Without warning, d'Amyot felt a thrill such as he had experienced once or twice when going into a dangerous engagement. He turned his head, and encountered a pair of eyes which said to him ineffable things in that quick glance. He was confused, and stood still for a moment, forgetting to rein his horse, and, when he turned about and started to pursue the carriage, his heart failed him; palpitation, hesitation, terror attacked him. The carriage passed on.

Next day, he rode again in the calzada, but not before he had forced his horse over many obstacles. He nearly turned back

after having joined the cavalcade, but he made a soldierly effort, conquered his hesitation, and continued to advance. For a long time he searched the carriages in vain. He began to think she would not come, and doubts renewed their attack upon him. He told himself that her glance, yesterday, was directed to one of the Mexican cavaliers, so he kept a jealous eye on the horsemen preceding him, while he transfixed the carriages with the other. Yes, it was she! Is it true that she smiled? When the carriage had left the calzada, Paul guided his horse across the alameda, and galloped him for two hours across the country. One morning he met her in the cathedral; she saw him, and smiled this time, beyond a doubt. Again he encountered her on the alameda, near where the aqueduct skirts it. She was accompanied by an aged woman. Paul remained dumb, but she spoke to him as to an old acquaintance, and seemed to enjoy his confusion. Perhaps

she was a little angry because he had not embraced the opportunity she gave him. When a Mexican girl smiles upon a man in the paseo, she expects to see him beneath her window that night. It is the custom. But this bashful soldier had not the air of a disdainful beau. Nevertheless, she may have thought with pleasure of the certainty of being avenged. He saw her several times afterwards, and always by chance. Again to-day he met her at mass.

Ah, to-day, to-day! the awakening was coming surely now—the hour of introspection was closing, its half-mournful, half-happy musings could be maintained no longer. It was time to open his eyes and look on an uprooted hope; he could no longer deceive himself; he would no longer permit himself to be that greatest coward, the man who is always hoping—

“Pardon, Señor Commandant! What orders for the start to San Juan?”

Paul looked up. It was Lieutenant

Prieto of the Rural Guard who spoke. Paul did not heed his words ; he was thinking — she said Prieto — yes — “I despise Prieto, but I could love him as easily as you.” Surely, not this man ! Prieto was a name common enough among the Mexicans. The idea was absurd — still —

“Prieto, do you know Señor Querraro ?”

“A personage of Morelia ?”

“Yes.”

“My captain has forgotten that the country is strange to me also.”

“You don’t answer me. Do you know him ?”

“No, Señor !”

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE PALACE.

Two women stood in the shadowy doorway of the bishop's palace in Morelia. Both were dressed in black, but the elder woman wore an ecclesiastical garb. They had just rung the bell.

"What am I to do in case Su Ilustrisimo shall refuse to see you?" said the nun, in a trembling voice.

"He will not refuse," replied her companion. "He is generous and good. Persuade him to grant me this interview. A life hangs on it." She also spoke in a tone of deep emotion.

"He may reprimand me for interfering."

"Do not fear," said the other. "Take comfort. You are doing a good action."

“If he is at prayers? This is not his hour for business; we should have come directly after vespers. Let us go away and come again to-morrow. He may even refuse to see me.”

“He will not. Oh! Señora Priora, Mother, do not desert us! Do not waver! It is your imperious duty to see him and make him understand that this question not only concerns my father, but concerns his own interests — it may be, his safety! Urge him to see me: my tears will touch him.”

“I know, daughter — I remember all you have told me, but I tremble. There goes the gate!”

The latticed gate swung back, and the women entered a handsome patio, where flowers and palms were growing and water trickling. At the beginning of a cloister-like passage, they were stopped by a grim-visaged priest.

“Your business? Is it you? Enter, my

sister;" — he bowed respectfully to the prioress. "He will receive you. Come with me. Wait here," he said to the priora's companion, indicating a small room off the portico; "wait here till we return."

The chamber was richly furnished. Through the swinging silken drapery of the inner door could be seen a vista of rooms opening into each other and extending around the portico. Soft cushions and heavily embroidered divans lined the walls, little stands of opalescent tiles gleamed here and there, reflecting the moonlight of silver lamps suspended by silver chains. Here was no severe asceticism. The proprietor of this house evidently clung to the pleasant things of life, and wished to live in the bosom of luxury.

Handsomely bound books of devotion littered a low table in the small chamber. Isidra opened one, but she could not compel herself to read. She sat in an attitude of agitated listening.

At length the priora appeared in the door. Her eyes showed that she had been weeping. Isidra hurried to her side, asking quickly : —

“What does he say? Will he help us? May I go in?”

The prioress could not trust herself to speak, but motioned Isidra to follow the sacerdote, who waited on the threshold. In another moment, she was in the bishop's presence.

He was a priest of venerable figure, with a noble and patriarchal air, but his brow was darkened by shadows cast by insatiable ambitions and restless dreams of power. When Isidra knelt at his feet, he stood for a moment pale and silent; then muttering a blessing, he told her, in a gentle voice, to rise.

The bishop ordered his sacerdote to draw a chair near his own, in which he seated Isidra, and, taking one of her hands, he stroked it gently. After dismissing the

priest, he entered upon the subject, speaking in the same soothing tones with which he greeted her.

“We know, my dear child,” he said, “what has brought you to us: and you do well to come. Where shall we bring our sorrows if not to God, the good and great? You do well to bring your pain to him; he will soothe it. Calm yourself, and speak what is in your mind. We are ready to listen.”

“Monseñor,” said Isidra, “if you know why I am here, you also know how to comfort me. But I come to request — not to demand. Oh, Reverence, my father! He is seized! I have no hope save in you. Do not close your doors upon him!”

“You are mistaken, my daughter. We only know that your father has been arrested and imprisoned — nothing more. We men of the church, in times of peace, hear but a faint echo of the world’s news, and in times of war, like the present, when

infidels threaten the very fabric of the Church itself, we must turn a deaf ear to secular matters, howbeit they involve the lives of cherished sons. Speak plainly, then. Tell us of what your father stands accused, how he has offended Juarez, for so much we hear; in short, tell us the details of the case against him."

"They are simple, Reverence," answered Isidra. "The French intercepted his despatch to a body of Clericals, giving certain information of Bazaine's return to Puebla. Nothing more, but it led to his arrest and the arrest of my brother. Benito carried the message on his person."

"So!" said the bishop, reflectively. "But the French do not wage war on children. Fear nothing for Benito. Have you appealed to Juarez?—he may effect an exchange of prisoners."

"No, Monseñor! Juarez envies and fears my father: he accuses him of treason and the wish to deprive him of the fruits

of victory. They have separated on the issue of the Church."

"Indeed!" said the bishop, in a well simulated tone of surprise. "Is Señor Querraro a true defender? Tell us if Juarez' fear is well founded."

Isidra was silent.

"We will conceal nothing from you, my daughter," continued the bishop. "Señor Querraro's faith has been under suspicion for a long time. Before the present disturbance he went contrary to our commands, refusing advice both in spiritual and worldly affairs. He neglected the confessional. Then he united with Juarez. It has come to our ears that his quarrel with the infidel rose over the division of spoils. That rumor may be false. We hope so. His later tactics, uniting with the Clericals and seceding from the infidels, urge us to overlook his heresy. In his possession there are, undoubtedly, many papers invaluable to Juarez' enemies — giving informa-

tion of his future movements, and, perhaps, lists of the men from whom his support is drawn, and who should be placed under the ban of the Church. Have you seen such a list, my daughter?"

Still Isidra said nothing.

"Again, it has been whispered," said the prelado, "that to Señor Querraro were confided, for safe-keeping, many deeds of lands and treasures of gold and silver, by citizens banished and proscribed during the interregnum. How is that? You do not require to be told, my daughter, that the Church despises worldly goods so far as they represent vain pleasures—but the Church may employ perishable riches as the means of doing good, for the propagation of the faith and distribution of alms. We consider it an act of impiety to withhold buried treasure from the Church. Will you tell us where to find it?" Isidra did not raise her eyes. The bishop asked quietly, "Would it not be better to answer us?"

She replied : " If my father has communicated to me secrets of the nature you mention, he did so believing me capable of guarding them even from the confessors."

The bishop instantly changed his tone, and said, with an appearance of great frankness : " Do not answer. We will not blame you for preserving silence ; we honor you for the firmness you manifest — a noble trait, descended from your father. Tell us, at least, if Señor Querraro had determined to oppose Juarez ? "

" With his sword," Isidra replied.

" So we have been informed," said the bishop. " We regret it, for we love Querraro like a son. His is misplaced zeal. The Church is in no danger. Maximilian will soon restore her to her ancient power. The Holy Father has promised to assist him. We can afford to despise the ragged horde of Juarez."

" Monseñor," cried Isidra, " have I been mistaken ? They taught me that you too

prayed for the deliverance of Mexico. I came here believing that you would like to see the usurper deposed ; I came to ask a boon of you in the name of mercy ; in the name of the blood which flows in your veins — you are a Mexican ! ”

“ Stop, my daughter ! ” the priest commanded. “ You are a good patriot — do not make us think you are a bad Christian ! The triumph of our Holy Church is paramount to the question of earthly crowns. If the precepts of the Church are not strong enough to silence you, then the considerations of feminine pride should keep you from entering the arena of politics. Yes, we have heard ! If you have assisted your father to run his neck into danger, we grieve, but we cannot aid you to disentangle it. His purpose was perhaps pious, but it was rash. ”

“ Reverence, ” said Isidra, in a tone as cold as his own, “ pardon me. I am

not a sufficiently good Christian to break straws. Let priests and sisters, who have severed human ties, argue thus inhumanly. My father is in prison, threatened with death; the Church sends him there. If he dies, he will die for the Church!"

The bishop looked at her thoughtfully; he sighed, and adopted a solemn tone.

"Alas, my daughter! Even if it is so, the Church cannot defend her own. Her strength is broken — for the moment, she is powerless. Until Maximilian's rule is firmly established, we exist only by the clemency of the French, who are more soldier than Catholic. We can ask nothing of them; in our present state, we dare not. Even if they should demand extreme payment of the man who has intrigued against them, from a mistaken but praiseworthy stand-point, we cannot change their sentence. We can scarcely dare to administer spiritual consolation. Yet, he shall have that! We promise, my poor child,

that a priest shall attend your father in his last hours."

"No quiera Dios! He will not die like that! My noble father will not publicly expiate his patriotism! O Señor, Señor, what have you heard?"

The bishop appeared to be disconcerted, but he answered her with the same soothing tenderness.

"Calm yourself, my daughter," he said. "We have heard nothing. It is our practice to look with clear eyes into the future and prepare for the worst. If Señor Queraro's blood is to be offered to the implacable hatred of men, it is well to be nerved. Together we will pray for the devoted martyr."

"Monseñor," cried Isidra, "you are deceiving me with words—you are deceiving me! Why will you sacrifice my father? Oh, I comprehend the power of the Church, I know how prison-doors open and chains fall before her. Why will you

coldly sacrifice my father? What has he done to confirm you in your fatal resolution?"

"Silence, my daughter!" said the bishop. "You are forgetting where you are. This is a holy place, whose peace violent discussions must not break." The sacerdote entered at this moment. "Send the prioress to me," said the bishop, and then, assuming a benignant manner, he returned to Isidra.

"Now that you are with us, my child, you must stay. Go with the good prioress, who will supplicate for divine resignation to visit your pillow. Long have we watched your growth, my daughter, and longed to clasp you in our arms and call you 'sister.' Have you never thought of the convent? It is now your only refuge, to which we welcome you with outstretched arms. Seek the mercy of God and the holy habit of religion. In a holy sisterhood seek the imperishable consolation, the undying bliss, of a Divine Bridegroom. Be-

stow on him the love you have lavished on an earthly — a weak and erring father. Believe us, it will return to you and descend like refreshing dew upon your head. Vain regrets, vain ambitions, vain pleasures, — all will quickly fade from your mind. Happy is Señor Querraro that, by a great sacrifice and rich offering, he is enabled to usher his child into eternal peace. Go, my daughter, go with the good prioress, and find in the blessed quiet of the cloister balm for the pangs that afflict you. There learn self-sacrifice, humility, and poverty, that the cares of this world, its agonies, its regrets, may drop from you like a heavy garment, and leave you dressed in the æthery robe of righteousness. Go! We will pray for your father.”

Isidra had listened impatiently. Her large eyes flashed ominously. Often she was on the point of interrupting him, but she controlled her emotion, and, when he had concluded, spoke calmly.

“I understand, Monseñor,” she replied. “The Church refuses to aid my father. I answer in the same tone; I refuse the Church. What! Shall I immure myself in a convent while my father lies in an austerer prison! Shall I confine these limbs, instead of hurrying everywhere to seek reparation for the outrages he has suffered! Shall I stifle this voice, that must utter praises to his deliverers or threats to his murderers, within massive stone walls! If you hope to intimidate me to throw away my life, — the only life that stands between him and death, — undeceive yourself. I will carry it to a better market than yours. I understand you — you refuse to exert your power to save my father, even at the price of my taking the vows. Monseñor, the security of my father and the future of my brother are my care; they have no protector but me, and I will protect them, though at the risk of life and honor.”

“Strange words!” replied the bishop, in a hard voice, “strange words to fall from the proud lips of the Señorita Querraro! But we forgive your rash, foolish, and impious boasting, we forgive the harsh construction of our actions that excitement draws. Before you go, my poor child, listen to a word of exhortation. Do not abandon yourself to a fatal inspiration; do not forget that you are a woman and sure to be seriously compromised in an affair of this public and political nature. Think seriously, my daughter — think without exaggeration; reflect calmly, and banish those extreme determinations, dictated more, we fear, by personal pride than family affection. Would it not be wise to accept our sister’s hospitality to-night? Night brings counsel; and in the morning we will talk of this again.”

“Will it change your determination, Monseñor? Will it soften your heart and urge you to labor zealously to free my father?”

“Alas, my poor child! Our hands are tied. We repeat — we can only aid him with prayer.”

“Then, I must go,” said Isidra.

“Come with me, come, my daughter,” said the prioress, sobbing. “My arms are aching to hold you!”

“Where are you going, my daughter? where will you look for assistance?” cried the bishop, intercepting her.

“Pray for me, O holy Mother of God,” Isidra answered. “The help He will not grant, I seek in man!”

CHAPTER V.

A WOMAN'S "NO."

CAPTAIN PAUL D'AMYOT made the journey to his new post in a state of mind bordering on stupidity. For the first time in his life he was careless of his men, not even looking them over when they rode and marched past him, and delegating absolute authority to Lieutenant Prieto, when he came for orders about quartering them. The love that had burst forth and submerged his calm and well ordered existence with a lava-sea of passion had met with a repulse so sharp and sudden that it burned and devoured every thought and habit in its returning flame. He was incapable of extracting sweetness of a terrible kind, by obeying the woman he loved, when she bade him leave her. All he remembered

was that he loved Isidra: all that he thought was that he could not lose her. He kept repeating this to himself with a torturing sense of his own impotence.

Fortunately, at this crisis, he had the strong arm of Prieto to lean upon: Prieto, who had flowing in his veins an extraordinary mixture of Spanish and Indian blood, cleansed from the vices of either; Prieto, who was intelligent and active to a remarkable degree, and who seemed to have learned in a few short weeks of campaigning what would take a Frenchman in his grade years to acquire.

This Lieutenant Prieto was a young man of middle stature, thin, spare, and sinewy, whose appearance of bodily strength and indomitable will impressed even the French officers, who were apt to despise their native comrades. All his movements displayed remarkable quickness and singular precision. He walked and rode with a graceful and vigorous swing that indicated

his ability to conquer danger—an ability won through experience of it. On Paul's remarking that he seemed fitter to be a mountaineer than a cavalry-man, Prieto replied that his ancestors had dwelt on the mountains. This meagre fact was all he ever said with reference to his history—which he wrapped in impenetrable mystery. But he made himself useful to the French, who had concerns of their own to discuss about the camp-fires, without troubling their heads with Prieto's private life. He seemed devoted to them, and they asked no more. Sometimes his eyes, shifting yellow eyes, with a gleam in them like those of a panther, dropped a glance that gave the lie to this absolute devotion. His mouth was another bad feature—it was thin and cruel, but a heavy black moustache concealed its expression from the French officers, who had grown to rely upon him and trust to him more than they would admit to each other or acknowledge to themselves.

Captain d'Amyot particularly admired the intrepid though quiet air of the man, and no longer felt any doubt of him. It was Prieto, therefore, who suggested and carried out the measures necessary to installation, and it was Prieto who, with silent sympathy, found comfortable quarters for his captain and left him to the healing of solitude.

It was fortunate, also, that San Juan was the squalid, desolate village it turned out to be. In his present mind, Captain d'Amyot would have been maddened by noise and bustle, the distractions of a large town where there would be the necessity to keep a constant eye on his soldiers, and the obligation to meet and talk with people. To recover sane moral sense, Paul needed to be transplanted into a soil quite different from Morelia. As it was, the forlorn and wretched hamlet, which seemed to have lost all hope, presented an exact likeness to his own hopeless and vacant heart, for

which he felt pitifully grateful. San Juan was a village of mud hovels that straggled up to the summit of a low cerro, and around three sides of a treeless plaza. The fourth side looked over a ravine towards an isolated church, a ruinous structure with its walls standing hardy and strong but roofless. There was no diligence-house in the village, though it lay on the high-road between Guadalajara and Mexico, and between Morelia and Queretaro; for, obeying the unwritten laws of travel, tourists slept at the next place on either side according to their direction, and merely breakfasted at San Juan.

Indeed, besides the church there was but one other conspicuous building, a sequestered convent standing on the highest part of the little hill; and there Prieto had provided comfortable quarters for his captain and the cavaliers, forty-five men, all volunteers from the regiments of General Mejia, while he occupied, with the Rural Guard,

as the Indian contingent under him was called, the church, sharing it with a half-company of Zouaves and the camp horses.

From his window in the convent, Paul's eyes could wander over corrals and gardens which had fallen to weeds and decay; the walls broken and the gaps filled with heaps of dried cactus, while the living plants were growing rankly and crowding out vegetable life of a less vigorous growth. Looking farther, he saw fields which spoke of former cultivation in the language of *acequias*, ditches that war had dried up more surely than the thirsty sun. This untidy solitude soothed his sick spirit; it soothed him negatively, awakening within him no thought nor question nor dispute. It made no tormenting efforts to dispel the torpor which possessed him. The natives also, when he chanced to meet them, preserved a gratifying silence, never speaking when they passed by along the ravine, carrying a great load of fagots on their

heads, or poising a couple of baskets on a stick over their shoulders. Sometimes he heard the gentle murmur of their voices before they came in sight, but it ceased in the presence of the stranger, and they pursued their way — old men, maidens, and old women looking up impassively, and showing him countenances languid and no happier than his own.

And yet, imperceptibly, the torpor was wearing itself out; unconsciously to him, Nature was breathing her influence over him, and the grave, calm mountains were teaching him the lessons of tranquillity and renunciation. Paul loved to lie on the summit of the hill, gazing past the fields and the hot dusty road bordered by tangles of mesquite, and past the level, flashing plain, to the mountains, gazing for hours while they changed from sunny, wavering slopes of green to strong, dark blue pillars holding up the evening sky. At the latter hour, he likened them to outposts of de-

fenders hurling back the invaders, or to grim sentinels keeping guard over the camps of the Liberals.

The Liberals ! the time came at last when this thought flashed through his mind on the wings of exclamation. It was by the first stage of regret for neglected duty that he passed on his journey to content. He was too good a soldier to look with poetical eyes upon the mountains, now that he knew them for what they were — the hiding-places of the bandits ; and he began to estimate them — the stately teachers — with the calmness of a man accustomed to overcome obstacles.

When the regular army of Juarez retired to the north after the prize of Puebla and the occupation of Mexico, all the partisans of the Indian President had not accompanied him. Many remained behind, masking their political belief in order to remain with their families, but more were pleased to take to the mountains and carry

on an irregular warfare under the Liberal flag. It would scarcely be too harsh a judgment to pass upon these guerillas to say that they speedily descended to the pettiest thievings, waging, like true lords of the road, indiscriminate and intermittent battles with land-owners and diligences. There is a country proverb which says that a Mexican is always by way of becoming a robber, and in this disturbed period the Liberals, once in the mountains and relieved from the strain of discipline, speedily worked out their natures, but they plundered nothing so sadly as the goddess Liberty, whom they professed to worship.

San Juan was a favorite neighborhood with these gentry, owing to its position at the crossing of two great roads, which gave the village the name of the "Key of the Route," but, important as was the place to the French, they could not afford to garrison it with a greater force than the few volunteer cavaliers, the half-company of

Zouaves, and the Mexican contingent numbering less than one hundred men, who, we have seen, made up Captain d'Amyot's little army. Of these, the cavaliers alone were actually available; for the foot-soldiers, Zouaves, and Rural Guard were not likely to come within gun-shot of the mounted guerillas. It was necessary to find means to transport a troop of infantry a long distance, where they would arrive fresh, and able to throw themselves into the mountains in pursuit of the Liberals. This problem, and another still more serious — that of keeping his men up to the mark, and preventing disaffection among the native troops, which in every previous campaign had proved a stumbling-block, confronted Paul when he came out of himself, and again took the helm. Upon the latter point, he consulted with Lieutenant Prieto, whose careful measures for retaining possession of San Juan had strengthened the confidential relations existing between the

two officers; and the lieutenant advised him, as his divided blood prompted, to give out notice of a grand *fiesta* to be held in the dry rambla back of the village. Captain d'Amyot consented gladly, and bade Prieto take the preparations for the festival into his own hands, while he set about drilling the little army and equipping it for a novel warfare. He determined to provide mounts for a portion of his infantry, and mules were purchased and brought in, while the soldiers spent their days in drilling under the superintendence and instruction of the cavaliers, learning at the sound of "boots and saddle" to throw themselves on their beasts like a squadron of cavalry — ready to take the road at a trot of two leagues an hour, to fall on the bandits, who were sleeping in the confidence that a day's march lay between them and their enemies.

This done, Captain d'Amyot longed feverishly for the report to come in that a party of Liberals were in ambush at a

cross-road, waiting for the passing of a diligence or some wealthy farmer. Action was what he craved, — it seemed that if he could hurl himself into thick events he might banish even memory, — but no such report came, and he began to consider the plan of abandoning San Juan, to search for the Liberals. His Zouaves also felt the strain of inaction, despite the charm of this easy-going, languorous life, while the Mexican soldiers were beginning to grow impatient over the delay of the promised *fiesta*; it is possible that their commander's unrest, so visible and poignant, had communicated itself to the soldiers.

One day, when Lieutenant Prieto was at the convent, reporting to Paul the progress that had been made in the festival preparations, word was brought that an Indian, dusty and perspiring, had just come in, bringing a message to Captain d'Amyot, which he refused to deliver to any other person.

“Good!” said Paul. “Here are the enemy at last — bring him in at once.”

The Indian entered, and threw a suspicious look towards Lieutenant Prieto, who had fixed his piercing eyes upon him. He said that he wished to speak to Captain d’Amyot alone.

“Come to the window, then. Remain where you are, lieutenant.”

Prieto stood by the door listening eagerly for the words of the Indian — too eagerly to be explained by zeal in the service, but his curiosity was aroused, and his pride was piqued at being excluded from his superior’s confidence.

“Lieutenant, have a horse saddled for me right away — I will go with this fellow.”

“Alone, commandant?” said Prieto.

“This is not the brigands, my good Prieto,” said Paul, with a happy laugh; “I shall be safe.”

“Pardon, Señor Captain! Take me with you.”

"As you please — bring up the horses."

The man led Captain d'Amyot and Prieto to a dilapidated farm-house, lying a little off the road, and stopped in front of a mud hovel close to the entrance. Here he prayed the lieutenant to dismount, and signified that Paul was to enter alone. Prieto again uttered a remonstrance, but just then a young Indian girl appeared on the threshold of the hovel, and, beckoning to Paul to follow her, while at the same time she motioned Prieto back, she led the way behind the hut and disappeared through a portal. Captain d'Amyot followed her, and presently found himself in a straggling farm-yard, surrounded by sheds and stabling. Making for the furthest corner, the girl dived through a gap in a mud wall and disappeared. Paul hurriedly fastened his horse in the stable and continued his following, which had become a pursuit, and soon reached the portion of the tumble-down premises in which the family

of the ranchero, the farm-tenant, resided. The Indian maid stood in the passage and signified that he was to enter. Then she closed the door behind him.

The transition from the white sunlight to the dusky atmosphere of the room was so sudden that for a moment he could not see. The next, he was dazzled by another sun; Isidra rose from her seat in the farthest corner of the room and moved towards him.

It was Isidra — no one else walked with that agile, buoyant motion; no one else possessed that slender, pliant figure, that delicate waist, that tiny hand. No other woman looked out upon the world through eyes so dark and large; no other woman could smile as she and illuminate the dark room with splendor.

It was Isidra, but inscrutably changed; her eyes shone in a feverish stare, her face was pale, and her hands seemed to be kept from trembling by a strong effort of will.

Even her garments were different from the simple dress Paul had been accustomed to see her wear. It was Isidra attired for conquest.

Something in her look made Paul tremble. She was in trouble. Paul was no longer touched by his own concerns. All he said was:—

“What is the matter?”

“I wished to see you,” Isidra replied, as simply. Then she asked in a low tone and with veiled eyes, “Have you forgotten our last meeting?”

She stood silent for a little, and Paul could see her bosom throb and her great eye burn with a feverish lustre. She pressed one hand against her heart.

“You will not help me?” she said, wearily.

Paul was silent; he hardly heard her; he was asking himself what did it mean. She could not love him—her face was not the face of a woman when she looks upon her lover.

“How can I go on unless you help me?” she said. “I must go on—I must tell you, unmaidenly as it seems. You will remember—oh, let me believe that you are kind—you will remember that I have been without a mother all my life—it may help you to forgive me. But if I tell you, can I hope that you will not despise me?” She turned away from him, and covered her face with her hands.

“Paul!” she cried, advancing towards him with both hands extended. Her face was flushed and excited, her eyes shone through tears.

A dart of pain and suspicion stabbed his breast; he drew back, and was silent for a little while. Then a sad light dawned in his eyes, and he said hoarsely:—

“You do not love me.”

She came still closer, and laid her hand on his hand. A sparkling fire coursed through his veins at the touch. He drew

away his hand as if it had been actually burned.

"You no longer think me beautiful?" she said, in a rich whisper. "Why despise your triumph because a woman asks you to your face with her own lips? Are your countrymen so ignorant of what is most precious in love?" she gave him a tearful look. "But you have nothing to say to me! Ah, Monsieur d'Amyot, how can I look you in the face!"

Paul shuddered from head to foot. Like a man who had just awoke from a hideous dream, he sprang forward and caught her hand. "You love me?" he said, in a hasty and broken voice.

Isidra turned away her head and made no reply, but suffered her hand to remain in his. Paul waited breathless.

She drew back a step, and, fixing upon him a searching look, she said, in a trembling voice, "Is it true that you love me?"

Paul would have clasped her to him, but

she added, "I wish you to love me truly — infinitely — a love that can bear proof."

He hardly knew how he murmured, "You may try my love with all proofs."

"All? If I should ask your life? if I should ask your honor?"

When her hand melted in his, Paul's doubts had vanished. He strove to find words to answer her question — to tell her that to ask his life were very little — to assure her that his honor was safe in her keeping — but the words were mixed and lost among words of exultation. It seemed to him he would have to find notes to sing the ardent thoughts glowing in his heart. Oh, how to tell her everything! Why was he silent? Where were voice and words? Who would help him to break through the dumbness that had grown about his tongue in camps?

"Isidra!" exclaimed Paul — heart, soul, and tongue breaking silence with one mighty throe: "There is nothing change-

ful about this love I bear for you. I love you with all my strength; I will give my life for you gladly. In this supreme moment my heart tells me that I am yours; it beats with yours and tells me that you came to demand something more than words of me. You need me; what will you have me do? Tell me why you came. I implore you, do not hesitate! Speak as you would to yourself, for I am no longer me, but your other self. A great need lies behind your simple words. What is it? How can I serve you? If it is with my life, you command it and you may be generous with your own. If it is with my honor, my honor is a trust which I gladly place in your hands. Do you recollect saying to me that you despised a renegade? but if I can work for you, it will be sweet to have you despise me. Will the company under my command serve your purpose? The men are bound to me, and they shall do your will. Whatever task

you set for me, you will not find me frail and vacillating; it shall be done, even if it is beyond human power to do. I love you, and I ask you to rely upon me as a bird upon the air."

As Isidra listened, a look of astonishment dawned and spread on her features, inward astonishment at an emotion she was feeling and not simulating. Her eyelids closed. She heard in his confused, half-told, broken words a strain of exquisite music. A pang of delight shot through her heart; the room trembled; the air palpitated and broke into rays of heavenly light; on her lips, on her hair, on her eyes she felt a murmur of kisses, the echo of his burning words. She tried to beat them off, but she could not; and she bowed her head to hide the rosy tint which was creeping over her face.

Yet she did not know why she hid her face, nor could she know until she looked anew upon the man before her. Question-

ing her heart to give up its strange secret, Isidra lifted her eyes and gave Paul one deep look, a glance which answered her question and set her to trembling warmly, a glance which told him — but who shall give a name to the birth-cry of love in a woman's soul? Like a statue Isidra stood for a moment — her lips parted, her eyes shining in a mist of tears. Then with one hand she toyed nervously with one glossy lock and with the other she caught up the folds of her lace garment, and hid her bosom, that for the first time she perceived was uncovered. Her lovely face was suffused with a soft flush like the dawn in the sky. A look of ineffable beauty settled upon it, and she began to tremble in every limb.

Watching this birth of love, Paul stood transfixed; he felt in all his soul a timid reverence, and he remained motionless before her. She too seemed to be at a loss for words and movement.

But she was still a woman. With his name upon her lips, she remembered that the man before her was the same whom she had flouted so disdainfully only a few days before in the church at Morelia. And why? because he was the enemy of her country, an officer of the army that enchained Mexico. But a memory still more terrible rushed back in a bitter flood, that drowned the words of love upon her lips. The blush of shame succeeded that of love in her face; she covered her head with her mantle and sank upon the cottage floor. She clasped her hands convulsively and set her teeth on her lips, from which the blood had fled.

“Madre de Dios!” she moaned, “I had not looked for such a shameful punishment as this!”

“Isidra! Isidra! you are torturing me!” said Paul, on his knees beside her. He took her resisting hand and covered it with passionate kisses.

At length her sobs wore out. She rose to her feet and pushed aside her mantilla and walked away a few steps. She moved in a lifeless way, shame being expressed in every curve of her body; she held her head down and kept her eyes averted when she finally turned towards him. But her voice was calm and low when she spoke, as calm and low as that of a lost soul which has worn itself out in pleading, and as full of inexplicable sadness. "I had forgotten that I was not worthy of your love; I do not deserve your pity. My father and my brother are in prison, waiting the execution of their sentence, and I came here to ask you to save them, to compel you to save them if there were any power in my beauty. It was not as a loving woman I came, but with lies on my lips, in my eyes, in my hair; lies to play upon you and deceive you. You ask me why I came. That is your answer. The heart rises at my shameful task and my dishonor. Oh, why

did I come? to what end was it all? It would have been better that they, and I with them, should die a cruel death, than — O, God pity me! Why did I not stab myself sooner than perjure my maidenhood? Was there no other way? I will gladly give my own life to save them, but to give my soul! You ask me why I came — I have told you.”

She ceased, and veiled her face with her hair. Paul threw his arms about her and strained her to his side; he would have pushed back the thick locks and pressed his lips upon her mouth, but she tore herself away. In a moment she came slowly back, standing before him, and speaking in the same quiet tone: —

“Deceive not yourself and me. I know — ah! I know too sorrowfully — that it is impossible for you to love me now. I have sinned an unwomanly sin. You will be merciful to go away and leave me.”

“Leave you!” Paul cried — “the time

has gone by for that—I will never leave you now. In spite of country, language, and friends, we love—yes, we love! and I love your father and your country, all yours shall be mine also."

"Oh, no! oh, no!" Isidra said, and lifted up her head proudly. "You must not say that—I love you for yourself, and if you forswore your duty, dishonored your flag, and betrayed your country, I would take shame for loving you. Moreover, Paul, that is a woman's part. For her lover she gladly expatriates herself. Her country is where he is—her native land, his heart. To that land only she can be traitor or patriot. Paul, you may never know how true I shall prove to mine!"

The next moment,—and if the reader knows not why, it was foolishly done to trust to his imagination the noble, impulsive character of this woman,—the next moment she leaped to him and clung to him and burst out sobbing.

Doubt, fear, sorrow, and the memory of the world, even of the nearest kin, — all were forgotten in that rapturous embrace. In utter abandonment of worship, she laid her head upon his heart, and Paul heard her voice murmuring a flow of sweetest love-names. He closed his eyes and listened. Like a traveller who pauses on the marge, near a row of alders, behind whose balancing catkins he can hear the tender gush of a brook, pauses and perceives clearly how athirst he is, Paul closed his eyes and listened to those touching sounds.

Then he drank.

At last Paul looked into her dewy eyes and knew that bliss was finite.

“But your father, your brother, Isidra?”

“Oh, yes!” she answered, with a shudder. “It was for them I came. You will save them, Paul.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE ALAMEDA.

AT six o'clock of the morning of the following day, the alameda of Morelia awoke as if from a bad dream, and looked about with a shudder.

The entire life of a Mexican town, from bulk to atom, is reflected in its alameda, without the smallest refraction.

The houses are only sleeping-rooms, necessary but insignificant retreats; the alameda is the city *per se*. It is town-hall, market-place, parade-ground; it is arena and ball-room. There people meet and walk and eat and live; there they smoke; there talk, — when everywhere else they are taciturn, — either about nothing, as only people can who have talked about nothing all their lives, or about politics, in which case,

occasionally, a party blaze transiently heats the cool place, and goes out in a fight or two and the killing of a man. In the alameda all ordinary days are spent, and Sundays and feast-days and other extraordinary days are observed there likewise. No twenty-four hours glide by but every living thing endowed with the power of locomotion, from the alcalde to the burro, may be seen there. It is to the alameda that the stranger must go to study the customs of the people, and thither a native must turn his feet to get the news of his next-door neighbor.

So close is the connection existing between the alameda and the people that it is far from correct to liken the square to a mirror — a silly reflecting surface in which a maiden beholds her face, that grows no prettier because of it. You might personify and attribute life to the alameda, and only stretch the truth a little.

That done, it follows easily enough that

the countenance of the alameda changes with different thoughts, like the face of a living man. And this independent of night and morning or the progression of the sun. Thus, being deserted when hot silence falls upon the city, the alameda assumes a thoughtful expression, and prepares to advise with one quiet counsellor — an old priest, whose soutane has met a rustier fate, in defying the sun, than the impenetrable skin of its master. Like a human thing, the pavement, nodding its answers by means of waves of heat, lends a sympathetic and encouraging ear to the monologue of the padre, and, when his shadow begins to lengthen, sends him away refreshed.

Again, this horizontal countenance seems to wear a tender smile when the sun goes and the glare goes with it; when cool shadows leave their hiding-places, and a light breeze starts up and fans the plaza's cheeks. Then the alameda shines and

glistens like a mother's eyes when she sees her children returning home from school and work, for now all the children of the square have aroused themselves from sleep and are returning to it. How the alameda thrills at the pressure of their feet! How pleased to watch little groups forming at every corner! How proud to observe the graceful promenaders as they swing back and forth by twos and threes! In sharp contrast to this pleasant even-time are the cold hours between the last zim of the castanet and the first chirp of a bird to announce sunrise — which drag slowly by. Long before the sacristan will turn the key in the great door of the cathedral, the alameda shakes off its heavy drowse, and bends longing eyes towards the sleeping people, but the alameda knows that the Mexicans are a bed-loving race. Between sunrise and mass not a foot will fall in morning greeting — if the square can trust to past experience. So it resigns itself to wait.

The sun rises sulkily, and seems to be protecting his face from the sharp air behind the folds of a serape. In his first light, the alameda presents a very different appearance from its evening look of warmth and sociability. The dull stone houses turn a vacant eye upon it, and the façade of the cathedral of dingy gray stone frowns down like a cold substantial shadow. A blank wall, whitewashed, contiguous to the church, fills out one side of the square, and grimly holds the eye, that has wandered vaguely over the other features of the place, fixed upon it by an intolerable sharpness. Round black marks, that might be traces of bullets, stand out prominent on this white background, and in the solemn harshness of early morning—that time of cruel truth-telling—they seem to be crying aloud the terrible history of the building. In truth, terror has marked it for its own. Here were the tribunal and subterranean prisons of the dreaded Inquisition; here the dungeons

of the foreign conquerors; even during the quieter interregnum of the Presidents, the house was turned into a medical college, and, by a ghastly chance, the dissecting-table occupied the chamber where formerly living bodies were tortured. Whether or not he heard these accusing tongues, a stranger would hurry from the spot, scurrying before that grim, white wall, a suitable object against which would be naturally projected all the bogies of his childhood and all his later superstitious fancies.

But this morning the alameda is startled by sounds quite removed from itself. It listens. Yes, the peaceful old streets of Morelia are disturbed by ominous activity. Down the widest of them, cut into the square transversely, comes a noise of rattling chains, rumbling wheels, exclamatory voices. A company of Zouaves enter at a quickstep, separating at the word from a mounted officer, and forming in line on either side of the street. Between these

lines the artillery clicks and rumbles and jolts forward, until it reaches the middle of the square, where it stops. Then throng from all quarters the inhabitants, who have been attracted by the noise of the artillery. All the people of Morelia — the children of the alameda — come, independent of station or party: Puros and Pintos, Juaristas and Interventionists, Indians, Mexicans, and Europeans, — in a word, every rank and grade is represented, although each man is so muffled up in his serape, exposing only one eye and the cigarette to the frosty air, that it would not be easy to distinguish the señor who boasts hidalgo blood from the vilest mestizo. Nor are the ladies absent. Fortunately for its drawing power, the event and the place sustain equal propinquity to mass and the convent-church, and it is therefore easy for a number of young girls, with their attendant mothers and duennas, to gratify a natural curiosity without exciting invidi-

ous remark. This emotional element of the crowd, indeed, could not well have been spared. Great and exciting as it was, the occasion utterly failed to invest the male spectators with more than apathetic interest, and they stood about shivering in common limpness. The Indian women, muffled in the mummy-like enagua, stood in a group by themselves, if a dense crowd pressing together at all points may thus be analyzed, and enjoyed, without repulse, the feeling of warmth that contact with other bodies gave them. Some carried children wrapped up in the hood of the rebozo, and now and then lifted down the infants to give them suck. Their husbands looked alternately at their own bare feet and at the frowning guns, without any change of expression. There were two persons only in the group of Indians who carried on a low conversation. These were a woman, wrapped in a coarse striped cloak that completely hid her face, and a

man, dressed in the uniform of a Mexican Rural Guard. He was chiefly distinguished by the eager and restless glances that he threw almost stealthily in the direction of the white-washed wall, as if he were impatient to have the commencement of a noteworthy spectacle. His eyes glittered when a company of Mexican soldiers entered the square from the street next the prison and drew up in line some twenty paces from the wall, examining their cartridges, an act which showed them to be leading actors in the scene forthcoming. A company of French soldiers marched behind, doubtless with a view of keeping the native guard up to the mark, while the company of Zouaves, who had ushered in the artillery, took up their position at the sides to prevent the spectators from pressing too near. The man was so absorbed in watching these preparations that he failed to hear the whisper of his companion. She repeated her question in a voice which trembled piteously.

“Why do you beseech me to remain until the prisoners are brought in? They will not be among them — my father and brother — you tell me they are saved.”

“If your father were here, he would bid you stay, *Señorita*.”

“But he is safe this time. Captain d’Amyot said he would ride hither to save him. You are sure of that, *Prieto*?”

“Truly, *Señorita*, I am sure of that.”

“Then he has already seen the commandant. My father is free. I need not stand by to see the others; it will be terrible! You say that when they come we can enter the church before —”

“Oh, yes, *Señorita*. See, we are close to the door.”

“Tell me again what Captain d’Amyot said to you.”

“He ordered me to ride back and bring you safe to Morelia.”

“No word of what he would do — when he would follow us?”

“Only that, *Señorita*.”

As he spoke, a murmur ran through the crowd, and he said aloud, “There they are at last — the prisoners are coming.” And at that instant a door in the white wall fell back on its hinges, and a guard of Belgians, looking warm and comfortable in their gray great-coats, stepped out. Behind them sauntered a magnificent young man — black hair, admirable teeth, great black eyes, a long moustache whose waxed points almost touched the overhanging brim of the sombrero on his head ; his firm broad neck sprung freely from the reversed collar of a gray flannel shirt embroidered in red silk. His waistcoat and trousers, of black velvet, were heavy with silver embroidery, and the botonadura of one hundred and twenty-five buttons sewed in a double row along the side of his trousers represented a series of little death’s-heads, done in massive silver. He wore calzoneras of tiger-skin, and his steel spurs, damaskeened with

gold and silver, tinkled musically at every step. The bandit Florès, for it was he, walked to his place with a smile, and kissed his hand to a friend in the throng. A murmur of applause rewarded this act of bravado.

Next a poor, shivering, copper-colored creature, with his serape wrapped around him like a blanket, was supported on to the ground between two priests.

And last came a man with his arm about a boy of barely fifteen years, who looked up into his father's face for courage to sustain this dreadful hour. Truly that cold and haughty countenance could give him naught but courage; there was no weak pity nor fatherly tenderness expressed in its metallic lines. He was a man above the mean height, deep-chested, thin almost to attenuation, his foot like a woman's. He was bareheaded, and in his black hair and beard but few silver lines were to be seen. He regarded the execu-

tioners and the crowd behind them with severe Spanish courtesy. Just so, it is said, his ancestor had looked when he strode into the flames in the square of Valladolid. Sombre, severe, fanatical, it would not be difficult to justify this man's reputation for cold ferocity, nor hard to admire his courage. Environed as he was with a bloody past, the very people whom he had inspired with terror — his own countrymen — felt a certain pride in his fearless demeanor, a pride that was not exempt, in these last moments, from a mixture of affection.

In the crowd surging near the cathedral door, there was the outbreak of a stifled scream, the muffled woman tottered as if about to faint. Prieto gave her a rough shake and whispered a word in her ear. She raised herself instantly, and read his face with a horrid fear. Then she looked again towards the prisoners, and fixed her eyes, without trembling, upon the figures of the man and his son.

The prisoners were made to kneel down between the wall and the soldiers. When the father was being separated from his son, he showed the first sign of human weakness. His lips moved, but he was obliged to reinforce them by a gesture of appeal to the soldiers. He kissed the lad on the mouth and spoke in a loud voice, — “Be brave, my son, and show these people you are not too young to die!” And when the guard had led him to his position, and the handkerchief was brought to bind about his eyes, he raised his hand and spoke again: —

“Mexicans: I am the first to taste this bitter cup, which I would drink gladly if I could empty it to the dregs. But it will be held to the lips of all my countrymen. To you I bequeath, not vengeance, but the spirit of liberty, that burns in my breast. *Libertad y Reforma*. It is a precious inheritance.”

The prisoners' eyes were blindfolded,

and an officer read the sentence of death aloud; the word was given to fire, and three prisoners collapsed at the same moment. One only, the youth, staggered but did not fall. He rose from his knees. He raised his eyes, from which the bandage had fallen, and cast one look of agony at the quivering body of his father. Where now was that noble face to inspire him with manhood and courage? "Oh, father, you did not prepare me for this!" A dreadful shuddering shook him as he watched the Mexican soldiers fumbling nervously with their cartridges before they fired again, his face twitched convulsively, his eyes made as if to shoot from the sockets, and —

"Benito, my brother! my brother!"

That wail cut the thick silence and reached his ears and strengthened his failing soul. A peculiar sweet smile parted his white lips, his eyes turned a grateful look in the direction from whence the voice had come.

The Zouaves followed the direction of his eyes, fiercely trampling down the people in order to reach the quarter near the door of the cathedral. Prieto turned pale through his yellow skin, and, without waiting to hear the second explosion, he put out a hand to drag his companion out of danger, but it encountered the rough hand of an Indian — the woman who had been standing beside him was no longer there.

Prieto's color came back to his dusky cheeks, he muttered an oath of relief, and, lighting a papiro, he left the scene of the execution and strolled back to find his horse. Mounting, he rode out by the gate of Morelia.

A horseman covered with a thick dust pulled up short when he descried Prieto. It was Captain d'Amyot.

“What news, Prieto? Were you successful?”

“Alas, no, Señor!” replied the lieutenant, sullenly.

“What do you mean, man? My letters — you delivered them?”

“Yes, captain, to the Señorita and to the general commandant; but the execution came off this morning, notwithstanding.”

“What devil’s work is this? I would have given my life to prevent it. Had you — tell me the truth, or it will be worse for you — had you a hand in it?”

“Not I, my captain,” returned the other, doggedly — “I fulfilled all your orders. May the devil seize me if I did not!”

“But the lady — the Señorita — where have you left her?” cried Paul, with fierce impatience.

“She dismounted here last night, and bade me carry her horse to the casa. Then she entered the city on foot, and I have not seen her since.”

Paul waited to hear no more, but, shaking off Prieto, who would have detained him, he dashed through the gate and up to the barracks. The general in command

had left at daybreak for Puebla; that was the news he heard there. Paul demanded if a message had been brought to headquarters from San Juan, but none could answer him intelligently. He was surrounded by his former comrades, curious to know what had brought him back. He made no explanation, but rushed out once more, without pausing for a moment to reflect upon the course he was taking or the probability of its discovering any trace of Isidra. He fled down the streets of Morelia, borne upon such wings as only impatience can wear, but weighted by the leaden fear that, when he found her, he would be blasted by her contempt and hate on account of his unfulfilled promise. In this mood he scoured the streets, in sun and in shadow, staring at the face of every chance pedestrian, with a strong wish to question him, but letting all go by before he could summon words to put it—glaring anxiously up to every balcony and

barred window and into every patio and at every blank wall, as if he would force them to speak and disclose her whereabouts. The wonder crossed his mind that he had never noticed before how gloomy and refusing these houses were — what heartlessness and enmity they displayed! He had never before appreciated this Mexican architecture, which has borrowed something from the Moors. These houses wore the semblance of tombs, and yet they were alive, and might put an end to his suspense and quest. But Isidra — if she were there in that balcony — behind that grated window — to his call would not she turn ears as deaf as the walls? Would not she press her mouth against the cold stones to prevent a sound from issuing to tell him — the destroyer of her father — yes, his murderer! — that she was there?

Long after he had been aware that this orderless quest was vain — after he had thrice visited every haunt that he

could conjecture was familiar to Isidra, he still held on at a pace that must have convinced the Mexicans, who were now abroad to take the evening air, that he was a madman. And it was not until the darkness and the noise of opening doors and the sound of a multitude of voices apprised him that Morelia had gone to the alameda, according to its custom of evenings, that he found himself in front of a house which struck him with a familiar air. He remembered that he had once seen her enter it. He pulled the bell again and again. No one came. A passer-by stopped and interrogated him. "What will you do with that house? Its master would not answer the bell if he were at home, but to-day he is out."

"Who is its master?"

"Señor Querarro, the patriot, was, but his house is narrower now."

"He is dead, then?"

"He is shot, Señor."

Paul turned and walked slowly to the cathedral; he entered. The church was dimly lit by two candles at the altar and a lamp at the font, besides the moonlight from the great window. He seemed to be alone there. He began a slow pilgrimage to every part of the church where he had seen her kneeling — at this pillar, before that altar. At each spot, as if it had been a holy place, he knelt and touched the pavement with his lips. Finally, he approached the chapel where he had last met her here. The door of the railing was locked. He fell upon his knees and pressed his head against the knob, where her hand had been. He tried to pray.

Outside, the alameda was lit up with the warm glow usual to this lively hour of reunion. The volatile people had long ago forgotten or dismissed the recollection of the execution; gay voices and laughter, and the sound of strings swept by tuneful hands, floated under the leather curtain at

the door and penetrated the church. The heavy scent of flowers and the smell of cooking tortillas entered also. Paul was unconscious of all this, and he remained in the same position until the sacristan began his rounds, closing the church for the night.

Paul went out-of-doors. By this time the alameda was empty and silent. Her children had again left her. The torches and candles had been extinguished, the many fires which cooked the tortillas had burned low; only the moon lit up the square, and showed that every sign of the grim scene lately enacted there had been cleared away — except one, for the white-washed façade of the prison exposed a fresh line of sinister black dots.

The alameda, in that ghostly light, impressed Paul sadly, like the pale face of a girl reproaching him because he had come too late.

CHAPTER VII.

A MEXICAN FIESTA.

A SURPRISING change was to be observed in the manners of the inhabitants of San Juan at the approach of the festival appointed by the new captain. They went about with animation, and followed the movements of the soldiers with eyes no longer fixed in a vacant stare as at first. The dull sadness which was generally expressed in their faces was succeeded by a look of eager anticipation. The fever of the fiesta had taken possession of them, driving away, for the time, languor and limpness, and filling them with the lively sensations of life, and the deep enjoyment of it, that can be experienced only by a people who spend the most part of their days in a sort of waking sleep. Only during a

time of festival the Mexicans can be said to be truly alive. They rouse themselves on the feast-day, and they reserve all their strength for the sports of that season. The fiesta is the very life in their bones.

San Juan itself, which usually wore such a hang-dog look, put on an air of mirth and gayety that went far to hide its battered condition.

The houses of the tortuous streets smiled in the sunlight, as if, instead of mud, they had been built of marble; and laughter so gay and voices so excited echoed from one balcony to the other, you would have thought a new and happier set of owners had come to dwell in them. At the approach of the festival, the ruinous village seemed to revive and blossom, just as the vegetation outside its walls, so dead and sun-dried, would spring up luxuriantly provided a sluice were opened there to moisten the soil. When the longed-for day at last dawned, it would have been impossible to

recognize San Juan. Flags floated from the balconies of the houses, and gay streamers nodded in unison with the swaying branches of every tree in the plaza, where a throng of people jostled each other trying to get a glimpse of the minor sports which always usher in a Mexican fiesta. At one corner of the plaza there was an exhibition of pistol-shooting at twenty paces. The contestants shot dollars from between the thumb and forefinger of one of their number, knocked the ashes from a cigar held by a man's teeth, cut a piece of ordinary twine held taut between two men, tossed a dollar into the air and hit it before it reached the ground, and performed other feats equally narrow and skilful, while the by-standers exclaimed in wonder, — “*Válgame Dios!*” — “God deliver us from such a shot as that!”

In the centre of the plaza a cock-main was being fought, and the crowd there was very dense; at the farther end, where

there were no trees, a straw mat had been hoisted, to furnish shade for the ladies who were witnessing a wrestling-match between two wiry mestizos.

At the mouths of the village streets, or where they empty into the plaza, temporary booths were furnishing mescal and aguardiente to the thirsty men, and green tables invited them to a game of monte.

But these sports were merely incidental to the grand affair of the rambla, and, long before the hour when the latter began, the majority of spectators turned impatiently away from booth and wrestler and marksman, and ran to get good places on the side of the hill, where they could witness the performance to advantage. As the afternoon wore on and the hour approached for the games, the hill behind San Juan resembled a theatre where all the inhabitants of the village had congregated — children and old men, Indian men and women, soldiers who were not expected to take part in the

entertainment, and every Mexican who lived within a circuit of twenty miles about San Juan. The women of the people were in the majority, but there was a goodly number of señoras and dark-eyed señoritas, who carried parasols of gaudy colors — a luxury harder to dispense with than a soul, in the creed of a *Mexicaine* — and furnished the high-lights of the picture. Immediately after the siesta the hill filled up, from the first fringe of plantain that had not been cut down, near the base, to its summit, with an excited, chattering multitude. No one would imagine that so many human beings were sheltered by the scattered houses of the little hamlet, and, in fact, the townspeople were largely reinforced from the neighboring haciendas, whose masters and families, together with all their servants and peons, had come to witness the games. It was rumored, too, that a dozen caballeros from the camp of General Marquez, at Queretaro,

had rode hither in search of distinction and diversion.

In the excitement of anticipation, the moments dragged along slowly, but at length the audience saw the judges enter and take their places on a platform built over an isolated rock at the foot of the hill. They had scarcely seated themselves when three Indians bounded on the track, between the judges and the people, and waited for the signal to be given. These were trained couriers, and they were in the lightest possible running order, being loosely cinctured as to their loins, but all beside bare, and their dusky, athletic bodies flashed the sunlight like obsidian mirrors. Their hair was worn long, and flowed away from a line exactly in the centre of the forehead.

At the word, away darted the couriers like leaves before a gale. An elliptic course, measuring three hundred English feet, had been marked out on the plain,

to which the judges' rock occupied a position corresponding to the sun's in perigee. The couriers were to make the circuit twice, and the starting-point was also the goal. Down the orbit flew the Indians, like planets attracted by the sun, flew with outstretched arms, and fists gathering the air, and feet spurning back hurricanes of dust. At the narrowing curve opposite the judges' rock they were seen in a bunch, but, as they turned, one man, the foremost courier, tripped and fell. Across his prostrate body the other two leaped and ran side by side, neither having an advantage over the other. Side by side they passed the judges, and like twin flashes they were away from the spectators and straining towards apogee before the people could muster a shout. They were still together, neck and neck, when their bodies began to grow larger to the eye, as the last quarter of the course was entered. But now it appeared that

one courier stretched a hand an inch ahead of his antagonist's. Will it be a race, after all? A low murmur stirred the crowd. See! he is head and neck in advance, and steadily gaining! But, under the bitter premonition of defeat, the second Indian throws himself forward and reaches forth a hand to trip his competitor's flying heel. In vain! and the action puts victory out of the question for him. They grow excited, they rise in their seats, and, amid outbursts of praise and encouragement, amid shouts and clapping of hands, the victor covers the remaining distance and halts in front of the people, breathless and panting, and no longer shining like a mirror, but covered with a thick paste of dust and perspiration.

Now the attention of the excited people is suddenly fixed on the extremity of the ravine, down which comes a sound like thunder. "The broncos! the broncos!" they shouted, and a herd of frightened horses dashed like a troubled sea into the defile,

driven by six vaqueros. At the outlet into the plain a dozen men were stationed to frighten back with furious gestures the escaping animals. For a few minutes, and greatly to the joy of the spectators, the horses rush wildly from one end of the ravine to the other, rearing, plunging, uttering neighs of wrath and terror. Every now and again their leader headed a determined but unsuccessful dash for liberty. At length a vaquero approached and galloped in a circle around the surging broncos, choosing with his eye the most promising member of the band. Having selected a horse, he called to his assistance the other vaqueros, who separated the victim from his mates and drove the others along the ravine before them, yelling hideously, and causing their steeds to execute furious plunges. Thus abandoned by the herd, the victim stood for a moment, and horse and man eyed each other before the contest began. Venting what sounded like a neigh of defiance, the savage

animal dashed along the ravine and into the plain, and the contest began in a trial of speed. The vaquero won, and closed upon him, swinging his lasso around his head, until it had acquired sufficient momentum, when he hurled it with a terrible precision over the throat of the escaping animal. Instantly the vaquero's horse stopped and braced himself, there was a sudden shock, and the *caballo bronco* tumbled over on his head.

This first act of the drama the audience viewed carelessly; but for the second, in which the savage horse was to be saddled, they waited impatiently. All Mexicans love to see a bronco mastered, for they seem to exhaust in the training and domination of horses their entire ability in the way of command. Timid and even cowardly in their bearing towards men, they exhibit courage and ability in conquering horses, and few will hesitate to match strength and mettle with the wildest and

fiercest of the herds that roam the plains. Moreover, it is entirely upon the training of a horse that his value, in Mexican eyes, depends. He must be taught to carry his head high and his shoulders free, to plunge brusquely, and to stop short, no matter how fast he may be going. At the slightest touch he must vault on the hams, and launch himself against a wall or over a precipice. Absolute submission is what a Mexican demands in his horse, no shying, no hesitation; it is for his master to arrest him sharply, one step from death. So much the worse for the horse if he is touchy or frets at the contact of the rider, or carries his tail erect when the latter vaults into the saddle! he is declared *rabioso*, and he will be all his life the horse of a servant. A man in Mexico who respects himself can only mount the horse whose tail, between his legs, attests complete submission. Consequently, the saddling and mounting of a savage horse is at

all times a fascinating spectacle, and the people waited impatiently while the ravine was being cleared and arranged to represent a stable. Presently, the conquered horse was dragged, half-strangled, into the arena, and all eyes were strained to see if he would accept the saddle, at once or offer an exciting resistance. He takes the latter course, and they are happy. A couple of vaqueros approach to offer assistance. The bronco is on his feet again and pawing the ground as if defying them to come nearer. It seemed that this animal had gained no wisdom from his first defeat. Again that sibilant, sinister siffle! The wild horse throws his body heavily forward as a lasso writhes through the air and settles about his hind legs, and at the same moment a second lasso settles and tightens around a fore-foot. His look of defiance changes to one of astonishment, then to a stare of agony, and finally to an expression of stoicism. Nothing remains

for him but to die like an honorable bronco. He falls to the ground ; surely, this is the beginning of death ! The shouts from the hill cause him to turn his dim eyes in that direction. It is true those people are enemies, but surely they will pity him, now that he is dying. No ! their shout is one of derision, a vulgar phrase, "Four irons in the air," and the next moment the conquered animal lies on his back. It is the work of a moment to strap a saddle upon him ; to turn him over and shift the saddle to his back is the work of another. Then the lines are cut, and the wild horse rises to his feet with a mighty plunge. He knows that he is free, that he has escaped from the valley of death. Filled with the fury of annihilation, he throws himself after his flying enemies, who double and twist in the ravine in order to escape. But vengeance may wait ; before him lies the beautiful free plain that he had never expected to see again. With a neigh of delight, he

darts towards it ; but what is this weight on his back, what is this deformity that distorts his shadow ? what tails are these dangling at either side, and, O heaven ! is that the face of his enemy, the vaquero, grinning triumphantly just behind his mane ?

— Horse and rider have disappeared. A trumpet sounds, and the multitude turn their eyes upon a small array of Mexican chivalry, who come careering down the rambla to halt in front of the judges. A gallant company was this — of horses curveting and disdaining the ground, of riders glancing consciously towards the animated hill. They had spared no expense in their equipment, and every horseman had hung about his steed and himself such a display of skins that he looked as if he were returning home with trophies of the chase. Hatted with the barbaric sombrero, heavily embroidered in gold and silver until it rivalled the sun in power to dazzle the eye, their rich velvet jackets decked with rain-

bow-tinted scarfs, and superbly mounted on Mexican horses, they pranced down the rambla, with fringes tossing, scarfs waving, and their trappings of fur almost touching the ground. One man of this body of horse easily excelled the others by the splendor of his accoutrements and by the superiority of his demeanor. He was mounted on a superb black horse, to which a magnificent saddle-cloth, composed of skins and fringes, lent a wild appearance. His chapereros were of leopard-skin, open down the side, exposing crimson silk stockings, and studded with double rows of golden nails. His jacket was exquisitely embroidered in an intricate pattern; two knives, with embossed silver handles, were stuck in his belt, and a fine rifle, with a carved stock, was slung across his shoulder. Around his head, under the sombrero, he had wound a scarf of Oriental silk, in such a manner that the ends, floating on either side, partly concealed his face, but in no

degree obscured his vision. Every eye passed over the other horsemen and rested upon this young stranger, attracted to him by the brilliancy and elegance of his equipment and held by his intrepid and dashing demeanor. No one knew him, but the spectators concluded that he was one of the party who, it was rumored, had come for the sports from Queretaro.

Putting their horses in motion, the cavaliers began a series of concerted evolutions, careering from end to end of the rambla, and over the plain with the velocity of Arabs, and then returning to describe in the narrow defile a star and a hundred other beautiful figures, in the execution of which no single rider had an advantage over his companions. At this exhibition of grace and skill the Mexicans cheered but faintheartedly, and it was easy to see that these complicated evolutions afforded little amusement to an audience accustomed to feats of horsemanship involving risk and danger.

These were immediately forthcoming. The trumpet blared, and the cavaliers who were then at the extremity of the defile toward the plain wheeled about instantly and dashed in a wild *jereed* past the judges and towards the other extreme, where they threw their steeds about without losing step and flew down again but this time bending in the saddle and snatching from the ground, as they raced past, handkerchiefs, scarfs, and sombreros, without checking the speed of their horses or losing their balance in the saddle. This performance was repeated until the horsemen were compelled to rest, and they drew up their panting steeds at one side of the rambla. The young cavalier, however, who had been conspicuous for success and daring, seemed to disdain to draw breath, and darted into the empty rambla, pulling his horse's mouth with the terrible bit, as he rode, until the spectators saw the fiery creature, astonished at such rough treat-

ment, rebel and turn upon his master, displaying all the temper and vice that the picador had taken out of him as a bronco. Animated by the desire for display, the cavalier strove in every way to goad his steed to fury — until, under the pain of a curb harder than the Arabian bit, and under the brusque displacement of the saddle, the horse alternately rose on his haunches and threw himself violently forward — backing, kicking, rearing, and leaping; during all these fearful convulsions, even the Mexicans, accustomed to wild horses, expected to see man and animal dashed violently to the ground. But the black horse displayed a marvellous power of recovery, an astonishing suppleness and strength of haunch, and the young rider sat his demented steed with superb calmness. Finally, this Mexican Mazeppa sought to restore his steed to its right mind. The ease with which he accomplished it plainly shows how superior to the methods of the best trainers of

Europe is the simple education bestowed by the picador. There was not required a pitched battle between the cavalier and the wild passions he had aroused, but the struggle was simple and short. A word from the beloved master, a pat from the familiar hand, and the horse, which a moment before had been swerving, wheeling, and plunging, stood absolutely still, drawing sharp, panting breaths, but all quietness, all submission. Loud was the applause from the spectators, who could enter fully into the meaning of every gesture of the rein-hand and every flexure of the graceful horseman's body. If the judges had then and there awarded the palm to this masterful stranger, the people would have been content; but he was to show his supremacy over his companions in a still more difficult contest, for lo! here come three of the fiercest bulls from the fiercest ganado of the region. Holding down their heads, from which their eyes dart baleful fires, and bellowing madly,

the mighty brutes rush up and down the ravine, and seek to break through the stakes of the corral that has been raised to prevent their escape. The cavaliers dash in wild circles around them, maddening by their yells the shaggy animals to a higher pitch of fury. Then three riders separate and prepare to put their horsemanship to the severest test. For it is no pastime — this colearing. To catch hold of the tail of a bull while he is in full gallop, pass it between the right thigh and the saddle, and, by the sudden jerk of reining in your horse, hurl the bull to the ground — that is no child's-play! Two cavaliers succeeded, and reaped wild applause from the enraptured audience, but the third fared badly. The tail slips through his fingers, the bull escapes, and dashes away from his horse, which is unable to recover, and throws the rider. Now is the bull's opportunity — he turns quickly, and seeks revenge on the prostrate enemy. That is a hideous mo-

ment — the shouts die on the air — there is an anxious silence, the hardened Mexicans tremble.

It is impossible for the cavalier to avoid the shock when the outraged monster lowers his great head for the charge, but in the nick of time a horseman dashes between the bull and his victim, attracting the monster's onslaught to himself. The bull charged with an angry bellow, but the black horse swerved to one side and escaped by an inch the cruel goring horn. A turn of the rein throws the horse completely about, and by this manœuvre the rider seizes the tail and the bull is down.

If the applause was wild before, it is deafening now, when the gallant cavalier rides proudly down to the judges to receive the scarf of victory. Men clap their hands and shout until they are hoarse, while women raise a shrill chorus and lean forward to catch a glimpse of the face hidden behind that provoking head-dress. "Som-

brero! sombrero!" shouted a number of voices, but the victor only bowed more gravely and swept a courteous gesture, with his open hand, from the brim of the sombrero, without removing it. Then he rode slowly back to his comrades, who were retiring from the rambla, which was being prepared for the bull-fight, the concluding sport of the day.

"You deserve their praise, Señor," said a cavalier, reining his horse alongside of the black. "It was beautiful!"

"*Nada! nada!* It was nothing. Those people, moreover, have drunk enough mes-cal and aguardiente to make them enthusiastic," the youth said, quietly.

"How is that, Prieto?" demanded the first speaker of the lieutenant, who rode with the cavaliers. "I thought Captain d'Amyot had stopped the supplies."

Prieto shrugged his shoulders. "You know the Mexicans, Señor!"

"So far, things have gone smoothly.

When do you return to Queretaro?" he asked the stranger.

"I shall spend the night here," said the other. "At the plaza, or wherever the baile is held, we will meet again. Adios, Señors."

In the roofless church, the ball, that terminated the festival, was proceeding. While the stars shone clearly, there was no moon, and lamps and torches were placed at convenient points about the walls and floor to illuminate the dancers; but these artificial adjuncts threw a flickering irradiation, that was broken up by weird shadows and ghostly patches of obscurity. In one corner of the church, guns and swords had been heaped up by the soldiers, wishing to dance unencumbered. This heap, when the torch-light struck it, answered by a baleful flash. An outsider, looking in at the door, would have distinguished against the dark background of the wall a darker dado of human figures, squatting motion-

less upon the ground, with a strange pattern of gleaming eyes and shining faces revealed whenever the lights shaped them. Among these black, inert bodies he would easily pick out the French soldiers, by their conspicuous uniforms, like broad streaks of red paint on a black surface. At the end where formerly the altar had been, the musicians sat, in cotton shirts and straw sombreros, and played indefatigably upon their stringed instruments; in front of them the dancers, twelve performers at a time, stood up in two lines, the men opposite the women, never approaching to close quarters, and beating time to the music by a shuffling motion of the feet. Simple as was the dance, in the light of flickering lamps and smoking torches, it acquired a character more spectral and solemn than grotesque or ridiculous. When the flames flared high, the dancing figures emitted a red luminosity, and resembled so many careering demons; but when the

light was withdrawn, they assumed the aspect of mysterious forms keeping step to a monotonous, ghostly measure.

The dance proceeded, and the performers began to leap higher and strike the ground with fiercer stamps—the charm of the tingling music was working like fever in their veins. Even the volatile Zouaves, who, at first, had been inclined to laugh at the savage movements, were influenced by the emotion which their neighbors exhibited, whether as spectators or as actors, and it was not long before the enticing, sensuous invitation from the silver-stringed mandolins swayed the foreigners as it swayed the Mexicans. The latter watched the dancing with glowing eyes, nodded their heads, and moved to the time of the lingering strains with growing excitement, and manifesting irresistible desire. During the pauses, when fresh dancers took the places of those who could no longer bear the strain, the music still went on, and the swaying of the

human dado and the kindling of those fierce eyes, until it could be seen that the music was rousing these people to a state of passionate excitement. Foreseeing this, the law-abiding citizens had withdrawn early, taking with them their wives and daughters. Therefore, without hindrance, and apparently without antidote, the poison of the music worked in their blood — the musicians played faster, the feet of the dancers described livelier motions, the performers who stood up now numbered thrice the usual count, the spectators beat time with their entire bodies, screaming out words of encouragement and ejaculation, while dark and fierce emotions chased each other across their countenances.

Suddenly, as if able to resist no longer, every man and woman in the ghostly church sprang up, and, choosing a partner, began to dance with eager, passionate steps. In every part of the building the dancers started up, and the whole place was

full of a quivering excitement. All were alike oblivious to what was passing in the town, from which, for the last quarter of an hour, ominous sounds had been proceeding. They heard only the wailing cries and groans of the instruments, and they heard the instruments indistinctly, as drunken men hear the cries in a wine-shop. It seemed as if the music itself were mad with drink, for the silver strings pulsed faster and urged louder and drove the dancers headlong onward. What would have been the outcome of that frantic excitement may never be known, for at its climax a man appeared in the door of the church, whose words acted like a safety-valve upon the crowd. In a loud and fearful voice, that sounded above the din of shuffling feet, he cried: — “Ramirez! the bandit Ramirez!”

He had shouted the words, and the silence that ensued enabled them to hear the noise of a battle. Confused shouts and com-

mands, the shrieks of women, the noise of firing — all the sounds familiar in border warfare — were borne to their ears from the village. With their blood heated by the dance, the conflict was welcome. The Macheteros rushed to seize their weapons, uttering fierce cries of joy; the Zouaves hastily caught up their guns and dashed out of the church at a quickstep.

On the plaza, the cavaliers, led by Captain d'Amyot, could be seen contending with a fierce band of guerillas, at whose head fought a youth with desperate valor. By this time the moon had risen, and, as Paul's reinforcement came up, every man caught sight of the bandit chief, and was startled at the resemblance he presented to the winner of the scarf in the afternoon games. However, there was no time for conjecture or amazement. Hot work was the portion of every cavalier and foot-soldier. The captain's little army was attacked on two sides; a simultaneous firing

began in the plaza and in the corners of the streets, where a company of guerillas had intrenched themselves, under the shelter of balconies and walls. The struggle was made to prevent the coalition of Paul's forces. At any other time, the bandits might have succeeded, but to-night the Mexicans fought like Titans; battle was an outlet for the fury and passion enkindled by the dance; they astonished their captain and themselves by feats of wild daring. Moreover, the citizens came to the assistance of the French commander, driven to it by the necessity to protect their property and lives. Transformed into soldiers by the shrieks of their wives and children, they fell upon the guerillas who were crouching under the balconies at the corner of the streets, fell upon them so vigorously with lances and missiles that the bandits were driven out of the protection of the walls. At the same time the second band of guerillas, although

they were superior in number, and commanded by an unconquerable spirit, had been worsted in the open encounter of the plaza: they fell back, but still kept their faces turned towards the defenders, and slowly retreated until they reached the winding road that skirts the hill on a level with the plain and the bottom of the ravine. Then, firing a last volley and uttering furious imprecations, they leaped upon their horses, that had been hobbled in the obscurity of the ravine, and escaped to the mountains.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MARCH.

CAPTAIN D'AMYOT had a purpose now. Throughout the remainder of the night he went back and forth from convent to barrack, seeing that every preparation was made for pursuit. He ordered Prieto to bring the Rural Guard to the plaza at day-break, armed and equipped for the march. Prieto ventured to expostulate—to leave San Juan, he said, and emerge into the open or venture into the mountains, would be to throw away recklessly the advantage Captain d'Amyot held over the bandit. Paul returned no answer except to bid him hurry to every house in the town and enlist into the ranks every man who could hold a weapon.

At break of day Captain d'Amyot rode down the winding road out of San Juan at the head of his army. First came the cavaliers, in whose ranks there was a gap of five men, the result of last night's foray and battle. Their scarfs and other appointments showed an appearance of haste and disorder, but they were well mounted; and Paul, fixing a critical eye upon them, rejoiced in the strength of these brave and seasoned warriors. Next came the Zouaves, who were gay at the prospect of an adventure, and filled with frenzy to join an enemy who had existed, up to last night, only in imagination. Weary of the long inaction of the bivouac, they bounded upon their nervous mules, and urged them forward with shout and slash to keep up with the longer strides of the horses.

The foot-soldiers followed them. They were increased to one hundred men by volunteers from the village. This contingent passed by the name of the Rural Guard,

and was directly under command of Lieutenant Prieto. A more unwarlike-looking lot of soldiers it would be difficult to bring together under one standard. Many of them, in the hurry of departure, had forgotten the military cap, that was the only mark of organization, and a few even marched bareheaded. All wore a look of patient sadness, which ill accorded with their martial errand. The equipment of this infantry, although meagre, was of a wonderful variety. Not more than one-half were supplied with guns, while the remainder carried lances and long knives. Each man, however, wore a pistol or two in his belt. Last marched the soldaderas, the female soldiers who accompany the Mexicans to battle. There is caste among these curious women, and the higher rank of camp-followers were mounted upon mules, while the humbler sisters strode along on foot. A broad straw hat on the head and an ample cloak to cover and con-

ceal the face and shoulders, protecting them from the dust, constituted the costumes of the soldaderas, whether walking or riding ; and in each case, also, they carried the kitchen utensils, and the scanty provisions for the meals, by means of a strap bound about the forehead. Two of them bore the additional burden of their sex, a sleeping child, hanging heavily in the folds of the rebozo, and swinging in concert with the dishes. Upon their feet they wore shoes of light sheepskin, or went barefooted, and the slap of the sole in the dust and the rattle of vessels were the only sounds coming from this strange rear-guard. Tramping steadily after the army, these silent, white figures looked like embodied spirits of rapine and desolation following on the heels of war. And so they are, to proprietors and rancheros, whose fields they rob and destroy. The soldaderas forage everywhere to increase the rations of their soldiers. Like a scourge of grasshoppers, they

throw themselves on fields of maize and sugar-cane, and the herds are luckless that fall across their line of march.

But to the Mexican soldiers they are a providence ; without them, the helpless, inert men would die of hunger. They are always at hand with deeds that impart more cheerfulness than words ; when men faint and fall beneath an angry sun, these soldaderas march with an almost supernatural endurance, and they were never known to desert their post in time of battle. After an unlucky engagement, the female soldiers brave the closing shots of the enemy to rush in and drag their masters from the field, in order to bury them, if dead, out of the reach of the terrible zopilote, or, if living and wounded, to nurse them back to strength as tenderly and piteously as if they were truly women.

At night, after the march, these white spectres really become women, doffing their mysterious cloaks, and turning as voluble

and noisy as they had been silent and expressionless during the day. They gather dried cactus and light fires, forage for dainties, cook the supper, coax the gorged soldiers to eat a little more, and, all the while, they chatter without ceasing, laugh and make merry, sing and pick the strings of a rude guitar that one of their number has brought at her back, smoke, drink, if they can get it, a long draught of pulque or mescal, and then they throw themselves down to sleep, pell-mell, among the men.

The long, white road stretched away between the bordering cactus, softened by the shade of an occasional tall yucca. The red blossoms of the cacti and the yellow flowers of the ouasatche made a brilliant but not discordant bed under the deep blue sky, and the breasts of hovering birds looked like other flowers lifted and blown about by an impalpable wind. It was a lovely morning, and for an hour the march, which kept in sight San Juan and its little

hill, would not have been called a penance. But when the village had disappeared behind a hog-backed peñon, and the monotonous expanse of woodless, waterless, arid table-land of San Juan spread out upon the right, and a wearisome series of undulating hills, either quite bare of vegetation or scantily clothed with the leafless palo bobo, rose on the other side, the hearts of the soldiers sunk within them. However, they plucked up a spirit with the knowledge that a league farther on they would descend into a winding defile, a ragged cut through the hill, and so pass, sheltered from the sun, to the town of Nopales, where lay Ramirez the Liberal.

Their disgust was deep when, upon reaching that tempting defile, Captain d'Amyot wheeled his horse to the right, and plunged into the seething plain. His strategic mind had warned him that behind the clumps of oaks and firs that shaded the divide lurked spies, to apprise

their chief of his coming, and, perhaps, an ambushade. He must match craft with craft, and it was primarily necessary to mask his true objective point. Nothing for it, then, but leagues of hot sunlight and the semblance of retreat. But oh, it was a dreary day's work he had cut out for them!

They had crossed the last half-destroyed wheat-plantation, and were in a region where no roots could grow except rank roots of cactus and maguey. The crumbling, thirsty soil burnt their feet, and they left behind a line of oozing tracks. The level of the plain was deceptive; there were deep sandy gullies to fathom, cacti, that had formed themselves into obstinate hedges, to burst, and piles of stone to climb over, that had become walls, no man knew how. Once, they were compelled to scramble through a thicket of magueys that reared their Brobdingnagian stalks insultingly, scratching and tearing coat and

flesh as the army forced a passage through, but spreading no counterbalancing shade over their aching heads. This penetrated, there was a respite of alfalfa, a rich crop, that had not turned sear, owing to some unsuspected reservoir. Ah, with what neighs of rapture the horses threw themselves into this refreshing sea, that rose up to their quarters, and bent their heads and tossed them from side to side in a hunt for the tiniest drop of dew! Just there a couple of coyotes slunk away into the maguey-bramble, and a blue hare started up and hid himself in the bush. Then vast solitudes, studded with gigantic pepper-plants, with odorous branches, which the soldados broke off as they passed under them; vast solitudes without road-marks, without a moving thing in the sky or upon the earth, except this band of sullen soldiers and a line of lazy black wings that marked where vultures were sailing overhead; solitudes they might imagine they were the

first to break, if it were not for mile-posts of dead horses and mules, where vultures sat daintily feasting; solitudes that dropped the blue foot-hills into the bluer mountains, where nothing could be remembered but the leagues of barren plain they had traversed, nothing could be looked forward to but the hot leagues to come. As the day wore on to its meridian, it seemed to these men and animals that they were being contended for by the pitiless heaven and the unnatural earth. They took no interest in the result. The humans hung their heads. They dragged their weary limbs. They grew indifferent to fate. The beasts lashed their tails furiously against their dripping sides. They turned an eye backward. They lolled out tongues. They longed to lap up their own sweat.

Still they crawled on, hopelessly and sullenly, without once looking up, and when it seemed they could go no farther,

but must lie down and wait resignedly for the zopilotes to descend and fan them with deadly wings, they heard a shout from their captain; the men raised their eyes and saw him standing on the verge of a deep barranca. The army hastened to follow him, and was soon winding along the rugged bottom. When they emerged, they struck down a sheer descent, and now the beautiful valley of Morelia, hid before as if it had been buried underground, met their eyes like a hazy inland sea. So this was a veritable flight! What excuse could Captain d'Amyot offer to the commandant for deserting San Juan? The horses clattered down the precipitous descent, the infantry and the soldaderas followed, and in a half-hour the army was stretched at full length under a canopy of trees. Here were dense tangled masses of luxuriant foliage, compactly bound round by creepers and parasitic plants, which shed a delicious fragrance around.

Here were great and towering trees that supported a grateful umbrella of air-plants and hosts of ferns, bignonias, dragon-plants, on which the sun beat vainly; here was an entire world of gay flowers, orchids, oleanders, roses, honeysuckles. Around them, the woods were alive with the welcoming cries of birds of bright plumage, and the rich, moist earth sent up a cordial aroma of invitation. Butterflies as big as the bowls of convolvuli swam before their eyes, exposing the under side of wings more richly painted than the rainbow, or lighted upon their upturned faces, which the insects took for fresh-discovered flowers. Through the loopholes of this flowery fortress, the soldiers were enabled to catch charming glimpses of a green amphitheatre below; a shimmering lake, well cultivated fields, and meadows where cattle were browsing in a warm, moist atmosphere. They had entered paradise, and hell lay behind them. O Mexico,

country of contrasts! where the cheerless and arid lie next door to the enchanting and beautiful; where there are no trees and where there are perfect tunnels of leaves; where the earth yields nothing or produces a wasteful superfluity; where the sun never shines but it scorches; where the rain never falls but it pours!

The siesta was broken, and Captain d'Amyot threw his followers into new perplexity by taking the trail which wound by steep gradients up precipitous hills where the loose stones came clattering after him, dislodged by his horse's feet, and so westward towards the mountains. They were turning their backs, howbeit obliquely, upon fertile Morelia, and a straight pull up the barren slope would land them once more upon that suffocating plateau. It was, perhaps, their captain's intention to retrace his steps. But he kept on skirting the base of the mountain, just within the belt of firs and pines.

Then crossing a bare upland, with little vegetation except the nopal-cactus and acacia, he struck into a wild trail, that ran hither and thither, yet followed a general impulse to the top of the hill. Climbing higher, their road became more attractive. It was a happy compound between the glare of the plain and the delight of the siesta-place; their eyes rested with refreshment upon the forest of dwarf oak and escobilla and broom and other flowering shrubs which surrounded them, and before long they were in the shade of a black pine-forest, that mounted quite up to the summit of the hill; and the cavaliers were compelled to bow their heads under the overarching boughs, that almost brushed their faces. They were steadily returning, by a circuitous route, to the divide which separates the plain of San Juan from the mountain-valley of Nopales—the very divide they had passed by in the morning. At length they

emerged from the forest, and, turning ever to the right, they followed an undulating path, carried along the edge of the ridge. Here Captain Paul for the first time displayed anxiety, and swept the plateau constantly with his glass, on the lookout for the whirlwind of dust that every pedestrian, every wheeled carriage, throws up in Mexico. For an hour the horses and mules toiled painfully over the glaring rock, under the broiling sun, seemingly in plain sight of any spy in the valley beneath. But Paul knew that, while thus marching cuchillo, his troop was safe from observation. The glare of the tepetate formation, upon which nothing but aloes will grow, would hide his men from sight as surely as if they were travelling on the surface of the sun. Besides, the reflection thrown back by aloe-spikes resembles nothing so much as a perpetual defile of lances, the favorite arm of the Mexican cavalier.

It was beyond that danger lay — where

the road winds down the descent by sharp turns, and between groups of jagged rocks. Paul scarcely breathed until the last veiled soldadera had safely descended the pass, and then he rejoiced as at their deliverance from the jaws of death, for it would be impossible to conceive of a spot better adapted for bloody ambushes. The road now became easier, but it was still beset with danger, and the captain's vigilance was not for a moment relaxed. He even redoubled his precautions when the level ground was reached, sending scouts ahead to beat the bush at the foot of the hills, but they discovered nothing to show that the army was expected. Finally, the silhouette of a mirador outlined itself on the cloudless sky, in which the glow of sunset was fading, and the weary march was ended.

Cazadero. A poor village, two leagues from Nopales. A single street lined by huts of gray unstuccoed adobe. A church

on the hill, overlooking the village. This mountain-town was sure to be in sympathy with Ramirez, but there was no help for it. The men must rest here until midnight, when, Paul calculated, he would make the attack. Mistrusting the villagers, Paul left a guard at their gate, and gained the hill commanding the town, where he established his camp. The hill could be reached only by the path giving on Cazadero. He would be protected in the rear by an immense barranca, sixty feet across and more than one hundred feet deep.

The hill lost its quiet in the uproar of camp-pitching. Every one tried to make up for the enforced silence of the march, by clamor and outcry. The soldiers threw themselves on the ground with loud groans of pleasure, swearing that they should lie there until morning without moving, but the next instant they were up and off—saddling and caressing their horses. The soldaderas, most of whom

had thrown back their cloaks, exposing their coarse, hardy faces, were hurrying hither and thither, and shrieking shrilly above the din. Prieto was everywhere, directing the men, ordering some to bring water and others to cut brushwood for the fires. Before long there were two streams of people on the path between camp and village. Indians from there, coming up with brush and dried cactus for the fires — brown-cheeked women, with long black braids of hair, carrying hot tortillas, that they had hastened to bake; the Mexican cavaliers swaggering down to buy mes-cal — and a section of the female soldiers, who set off for the fields about the village in search of maize and grass. In this hive there were only two drones — Paul, who had withdrawn to the level ground before the church, and, sitting on his horse, was gazing dreamily over the mountain-valley in the waning light, and a soldadera, who had not dismounted from her mule, but

stood at the top of the path, following her companions with her eyes. Near the bottom of the hill they were confronted by a bull, which was being driven by two vaqueros clad in leather from scalp to heel, to be killed to supply meat for the colony. It seemed that these women-soldiers had discarded courage with their cloaks. They screamed, and set out on a run for the top of the hill. After they plunged the bull, tossing his head and looking for a chance to escape. At the summit he saw a widening of the path, where he might turn and charge upon his captors, but before he was able to swing his bulk about, using his fore-feet as a pivot, a lasso hissed through the air and encircled his horns. The bull leaped forward with a bellow, quick to avenge his defeat on the first comer. She was a woman mounted on a mule. Taurus lunged towards her, and gored the animal frightfully with his horn.

In an agony of pain and fear, the wounded beast flew across the crest of the hill, in the direction of the ravine, bearing its rider to a certain death. Men looked on aghast or ran aimlessly after her—women set up a dreadful shrieking that woke Captain d'Amyot out of his dream; a glance was enough to reveal the situation. He threw his horse into a gallop in pursuit of the mule, overtook it, seized the soldadera with his left arm, and, by a puissant effort, without releasing his hold on the affrighted woman, he stopped his horse just on the verge of the precipice, down which, with terrible impetus, the mule went tumbling and crashing.

It all happened in a breath. The soldadera was safe, but trembling violently. Paul placed her gently on the ground and returned calmly to the camp, welcomed by the soldiers with shouts of praise and admiration.

Under a clear arch, where shone the

Southern Cross in all its splendor, the camp slept, guarded by sentinels.

Only Paul, who had lain down in his heavy mantle by a lonely and smothered fire, felt no desire for sleep, but, absorbed in his own thoughts, he gazed, unconscious, at the scene before him. The hill was covered with soldiers who had gone to rest in pairs or in groups, their hands clasping their weapons. The horses were hobbled in front of the church, and occasionally uttered ringing neighs, sounds that broke ghostly on the silence. The flame of the camp-fires, built in many places, that had been allowed to smother, revived now and then, illuminating the hill, and revealing, by lightning-like flashes, guns and lances scattered about, and kettles and vessels that had been used for the evening meal.

The village at the foot of the hill appeared to sleep, and its low walls and roofs, its gate and fountain, flashed quietly in the

glare of the camp-fire, beside which the sentinels sat.

Paul gazed upward at the sky. The air was pure and cold ; the innumerable stars twinkled as they do in winter nights of northern latitudes.

There was neither rest nor comfort for him in contemplating this serenity. He dreaded these quiet hours. Only when it was necessary to consider, to calculate, to devise schemes to overcome a greater force with a less ; when the battle waged furiously, when trumpets blared, when swords flashed and bullets whistled, when blows were striking thick and fast in every direction, when men were falling and horses flying, — only then was Paul carried out of himself, and relieved from dismal misgivings. They crowded heavily about him now. Isidra — where was she ? His search for her had been futile. She had disappeared as if she had died. Was she dead ? His heart told him no. But if she was

alive and he should see her again, would he find that she still loved him?

Paul turned uneasily and muttered a prayer that the hours might quickly tell midnight, when he could arouse his men and forget in battle the oppression at his heart. In the meantime, he set himself to perfecting his plans for this night's work. He could not be confident that Ramirez was ignorant of his approach, and a midnight attack upon a force superior to his own in number and knowledge of the mountain-passes, waiting, perhaps, in ambush for him, assumed the character of foolhardiness. Nevertheless, he clenched his purpose to snatch success by sheer bravado, and he began to forget, in a degree, his arguments and the anxiety they were intended to distract, and closed his eyelids in welcome sleep.

But at the touch of a hand placed lightly on his shoulder he started up broad awake.

He saw beside him the motionless figure

of a woman, completely muffled in her cloak, a finger on her lips as if entreating silence. Her face was shrouded, and only the eyes gleamed strangely in the dying light of the fire as they stared into his. Something in that stare made him think her purpose was unfriendly.

“Who are you? What do you want?” he exclaimed.

Again she made a gesture to bid him hold his peace, and, looking apprehensively around her, she dropped upon her knees and began to speak.

“Señor caballero,” she murmured, in a low voice, “you have saved my life. I can pay the debt. It is known that to-night you expect to surprise Ramirez. Have a care! for he awaits you in the barranca before Nopales with four hundred cavaliers. He has been informed that your troop scarcely number two hundred soldiers. You know now that treason marches with you. Believe me, and adieu! We are quits.”

Speaking the last words, she rose to her full height. Paul put out a hand to detain her, but she escaped him. The soldadera turned and was lost in the shadow.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BATTLE.

DAY broke on the horizon, day melodious with the song of birds, mingled with the silver ringing of the bell of Cazadero, which called the pious Indians to the Angelus. After that good night's repose, every one went lightly about, attending to his duties; the soldaderas prepared breakfast, while the men looked to their weapons and fed and watered the horses.

Prieto sought Captain d'Amyot, and remonstrated at the rashness of attacking the guerillas with a handful of men.

"Remain behind with the women, if you are afraid," Paul answered. "I came from San Juan determined to fight this Ramirez, and I will not turn back without seeing him."

“A thousand pardons, my commander,” continued the lieutenant; “but let us wait until night, when there will be no perceiving the weakness of our army.”

Paul fixed a blazing eye upon him. “Your counsel doubles strangely,” he said, in a stern voice. “Last night, you implored me to wait until morning, in order to get a better knowledge of the ground of operations. I advise you to think twice, lieutenant, before you attempt to betray me. No — I don’t doubt you — I will give you a new proof of my confidence. Here is a company of Zouaves, ‘a la disposicion de usted.’ They have orders to obey you as myself. Go on in advance, cross the ravine and put the enemy between yourself and me. In these mountains you will be unseen. The men must leave their mules at the bottom of the barranca and gain the summit on foot. There must be no skirmishing with stragglers. Leave Ramirez to me, but, at the sound of firing,

advance, and throw your men on the rear of the Liberals. Vaya Dios !”

Prieto's eyes glistened, but he paused for no reply. He put himself in front of the mounted Zouaves and rode out of the gate of the village. Paul, no less prompt, summoned his little force, the cavalry and Mexican foot-soldiers, and marched forth in quest of the enemy. When the village had been left behind them, he ordered a halt, and addressed his men : —

“Soldiers !” he cried, “the morning will be hot. We are one to five ; but be not dismayed at the number of the Liberals. God will permit the few to conquer the many. You must be brave, cool-blooded, and keep your eyes on me. Above all, do not forget that we are called to avenge our poor comrades murdered at San Juan. Now, forward, and trust in God !”

The column began to march, the eyes of every soldier plunged into the mists of morning that slightly veiled the road.

Beads of perspiration hung on every brow. They seemed already to smell powder. As they passed him, Paul looked at each man critically, mentally choosing the bravest and choicest of his guards for a hazardous enterprise. The soldaderas, true to their custom, brought up the rear, but she who had warned him against treason was not among them. Paul concluded that, not having a mount to replace her ill-fated mule, she had remained behind the column.

They approached the ravine of Nopales. Every eye was on the anxious watch. Two bullets whizzed over their heads, the "*avanzardas*," the advance greetings of Ramirez. The French captain had descried the enemy at a distance, although the mists that rose out of the barranca prevented his seeing them distinctly and ascertaining their numbers. Drawing nearer, he saw a rapid line of cavaliers who shot on the wing, and behind these sharp-shooters, who send their deadly bullets with an accom-

paniment of savage cries, he could make out two squadrons of cavalry, who had dismounted, and were awaiting the battle, lances to the wind, behind an earthwork of mole-hills. Paul drew his infantry under cover, and made a final reconnoitring before giving battle. On the other side of the ravine a conical hill rose to the height of five hundred feet above its bed, and on one projecting shoulder, raised well above the confused mass of farm-buildings and Indian cottages which swarmed at its base, stood a hacienda, the residence of some great proprietor. Its white walls gleamed like those of a fortress in contrast to the sombre brown of the surrounding buildings, and a turret at one corner gave it still more the look of a strong citadel. Moreover, where the ground fell away in front, it was supported by a lofty artificial terrace, faced with stone, which gave the hacienda such a pugnacious air as to suggest at once a place of retreat to the

captain's experienced eye. Quickly picking out the soldiers whom he had previously chosen, and desiring three trusted cavaliers to dismount and accompany on foot this selected body, Paul ordered them to cross the ravine, opposing sharp-shooters to sharp-shooters, and thus gain the level ground on the other side, taking advantage of the hacienda, to which they could retreat in case of failure.

They set out, and, from the shouts of laughter and sarcastic cries which greeted them, it was evident that the Chinacos mistook this little band for the entire army. Laughing and jeering, the bandits rushed down to overwhelm them. But they miscalculated, and soon found themselves on lower ground than the invaders, who instantly gained the farther slope, where they turned, and, firing with deadly effect into the midst of the Chinacos, rolled many of their number into the stream at the bottom of the ravine. Meanwhile,

Paul, who had counted upon his sharpshooters to distract the enemy's attention from his own movements, disappeared with his half-squadron into the ravine, crossed it without being observed, and, emerging, sabre in hand, on the opposite bank, swept down like a hurricane on the squadrons, who had their backs turned towards him. The Liberals, thus surprised when they were meditating to rush into the ravine to the relief of their sharpshooters, were thrown into confusion, and gave way, the cavaliers following hard upon them. The next moment they rallied, and the shock took place; there was the sharp meeting of iron and steel; the bandits made front, and the cavaliers hurled themselves against it with an impetuous charge.

Then Captain d'Amyot's sharpshooters, led by three cavaliers, sallied out of the ravine, and charged in turn upon the Chinacos, who thought they were caught be-

tween two armies. Without stopping to count the number of this new enemy, but dismayed at these attacks from opposite quarters, they began to fall back, despite the fury of Ramirez, who never ceased to encourage his partisans. Again and again he brought his wild followers to a stand, only to see them turn and fly before the murderous volley of the cavaliers. They fled to the shelter of a grove of oaks, and there the voice of their chief, raised above the tumult, was heard stinging them into something like courage.

Captain d'Amyot looked anxiously for a sign of his brave Zouaves. Where were they? Prieto knew the way too well to be mistaken, and the noise of the skirmish could have been heard over a vast extent of country. If the Zouaves were here, he could surround the wood on all sides before the enemy reformed. As it was, it would be suicidal to separate his insufficient force into detachments. Paul ground

his teeth impotently, and scanned the surrounding country with restless impatience. But the army of the Liberal was already recovered; they had mounted their horses, fastened to the oak-trees at the time of the first surprise, and now they rode out furiously, aiming their rifles, brandishing their lances, shouting hideously, their eyes flashing, their scarfs and silver-embroidered jackets shining brilliantly in the sun. In front rode Ramirez, the most brilliant and the most furious of them all; a netted silk handkerchief streamed from under his broad sombrero, caught by a golden serpent, and from the saddle-bow to the damaskeened stirrups floated a rich embroidered scarf, the same he had won in the lists at San Juan. From rage and the heat of battle, his face was on fire; he shouted in the voice of a demon, encouraging his men, driving them on; he was everywhere, waving his pistol in the air at the head of the Liberal forces at one mo-

ment, and at the next inflaming the last line of soldiers to emulate his example; and wherever he was, after the battle was joined, there the enemy fell thick and fast: not a cavalier in the French army could stand against him; he must either fly or be hewed down by Ramirez.

Paul followed this agile and valorous youth with glances of sincere admiration. He was in danger of forgetting to take measures to defeat him, in the grim pleasure one hero takes in observing the exploits of another; but where the battle was thickest, he saw a sight that drove the blood to his face, and filled him with the fury of hate. It was the sight of Prieto, fighting by the side of the Chinaco chief, and remorselessly thrusting his lance into the bodies of his former companions.

“Where are my soldiers?” cried Paul.
“What have you done with my soldiers?”
And with that he spurred his horse cruelly,

and bounded towards Prieto to drag him from the saddle.

The Chinacos closed up, and a terrible combat ensued. Although outnumbered, the cavaliers fought manfully, disputing the ground inch by inch; but the foot-soldiers of the Rural Guard quickly gave up the contest, and set out in dastardly retreat towards the hacienda. Shouting "Shame!" Paul strove to recall them, and turned his horse's head to force them to rally, but it was useless. They were at the end of their courage.

The little band of cavalry, however, kept the enemy in check, fighting hand-to-hand, until a bullet struck their captain's horse in the breast, and he had barely time to leap to the ground to keep from being crushed under the maddened animal.

Then Paul perceived that his party was in danger of annihilation, and gave the signal to retreat.

Furious at the sight of their prey about

to escape them, the Chinacos pressed vigorously on; but a volley from the Rural Guard repulsed them, and Captain Paul, with his surviving companions, had closed the gates, and they were safe within the hacienda. As the little army mounted in single file by a slanting roadway cut through the terrace and commanded by it on either side, the soldiers exulted as if they were entering a fortress. Reaching the level of the terrace and passing into the court-yard of the hacienda, they grouped about Captain d'Amyot to hear his further orders.

“To the walls!” he shouted. “To the walls! Save your powder! Don’t fire until you can bring down a man. And no noise, no answering their taunts.”

If the qualities of sagacity and subtlety had been required in a commander during the progress of the battle, they were ten times more necessary now. The loyal cavaliers were sadly decimated, and the

Rural Guard could not be depended upon. To supply the lack of defenders Paul became more adroit and active than he had shown himself before. He flamed at all parts of the wall, directing and animating his soldiers; pulling a man out of range when he observed an enemy's gun aimed at him, binding up wounds, seizing a rifle and eliciting a death-scream from a poor wretch below. Ever his eye sought one man, and he hesitated before aiming, as the lion-hunter hesitates, and suffers the panther to escape, when out for kingly game. At such moments he might have been heard to murmur:—

“Would that this were destined for you, my worthy lieutenant!”

But neither Prieto nor the Chinaco chief exposed himself to the deadly fire of the besieged. Apparently undirected and in the blindest fury the bandits rushed to the hacienda, attacking suddenly and at various points, and assailing the most difficult

places of the walls. They climbed like madmen on to the roofs of the dominated buildings, exposing their bodies to the enemy overhead, who fired upon them, or rained down stones and other missiles when their rifles were reloading. As fast as they mounted, they were shot down or dashed from the roofs of the huts, and many dead bodies lay in heaps beneath the walls. At length the lively fusillade had its effect; the Chinacos seemed to abandon all hope of effecting an entrance into the hacienda, and withdrew to the wood, carrying off their wounded. Seeing this retreat, the defenders could not refrain from a shout of rejoicing. But Captain d'Amyot had no illusions; he knew the respite would be of short duration.

So it proved. Paul had ordered the wounded to be carried out of the courtyard, and was fearfully counting his diminished garrison, when a cry from the opposite terrace warned him that the Liberals

were returning. They came in force, bearing great bundles of brushwood and straw. Horrible ! It was plain the enemy intended to burn the hacienda. For a moment Paul's heart sank, but only for a moment ; the next, he had recovered his wonted energy, and, darting to the walls, he passed the order for every soldier to reserve fire until he could make a certain shot. "We can hold them at bay until night, men," he shouted, in cheerful tones ; "then a sortie to gain the ravine, and we are saved !"

The firing commenced again. Paul exposed himself to the sharpest danger, to animate his men, who were repeatedly driven back from the wall, and, but for his example, they would have been eager to surrender. The white wall of the terrace was stained with their blood, and ten dead bodies were stretched out on the sand of the court-yard. The incendiaries gained ground ; protected in the rear by a

company of sharp-shooters, and holding up the straw and brush bundles to serve as shields, they succeeded in reaching the shelter of the huts, where they distributed the combustible material. A torch was applied, and in an instant red tongues of flame were lapping the hacienda on three sides.

The sufferings of the besieged became intense. The wounded men sent up cries of horror when they heard the crackling of flames, while the soldiers lay suffocating along the walls, unable longer to load their rifles or take sure aim. With the smoke pouring in volumes through the rooms and filling the court-yard, with sparks flying in all directions and threatening at every moment to ignite the wood-work of the portico, further defence was impossible. It had resolved itself into remaining there to perish, or sallying out to sell their lives as dearly as possible. Paul called a retreat, and set the example

by carrying a wounded Mexican into the tunnelled roadway, which offered, at best, only a slower death by suffocation. The cavaliers followed him, transporting all the wounded soldiers, and then drew up in line before the sally-port, rifles loaded, sabres and lances in hand, and with the look upon their faces which precedes dissolution. In front stood Captain d'Amyot, with his hand upon the bolt, ready to throw back the iron doors; but he hesitated, and stood listening for the repetition of a sound. It came again — the blare of a trumpet.

“Thank God! my Zouaves at last!” His cry threw the cavaliers, who had calmly resolved to die, into a tremor of excitement. The men, who had grasped their weapons with firm hand when they expected to perish, now felt stock and blade shake to and fro nervously. To give himself and his soldiers time to recover, Paul ran up the steep path and

across to the walls to see what was going forward below. Yes! there stood the gallant Zoo-Zoos at the mouth of the ravine, firing volley upon volley into the quavering mass of the enemy, and beyond, to the right, who were those men coming rapidly over the brow of the hill? Joy! 'twas a company of chasseurs putting spurs to their horses, and hurrying to place themselves between the woods and the guerillas.

“Quick! throw open the doors and let us be in at the death,” shouted d’Amyot, and then, as they poured forth, he added, in a stentorian voice, “A prize for Prieto, alive or dead!”

Outside, the Chinacos were drawn up in two lines, one facing towards the Zouaves and the other composed of the besiegers and the incendiaries who were marching or running towards the hacienda.

“Guard the gate! Don’t let a man through! Form a solid line there! Remain where you are, my Turks!” So

shouted Paul to his cavaliers and to the Zouaves, heedless that the latter could not hear his commands. But it was no time for plans and arrangements of battle. The Liberals were attacked on all sides, and in front, and from the ravine, and out of the hacienda rushed enemies to slaughter them. They were thrown into confusion, their horses were shot beneath them, but they fought on desperately, and would not surrender. Only one horseman kept his saddle, and he was the chief, Ramirez, who flew like a demon of war to all parts of the field, striking death as he went.

Towards him Captain d'Amyot pushed his handful of men. He had an idea that where the chief was, there he would find Prieto. But to find a man in that fighting mass was an impossible task. The Zouaves and the chasseurs had closed up until their wings almost lapped, thus circumscribing the battle-ground to the number of Liberals who still kept their feet upon the earth.

Now there was no room to aim a rifle—it had come to swords and knives. Fighting backwards, Paul reached the line of chasseurs. At that point, Ramirez, who knew that the affair was growing too hot for him, had flung himself with the remnant of his squadron upon the line, in the effort to escape.

Laying about him with his sword, and firing his smoking revolver with deadly effect, he spurred his foaming horse into a leap, overthrowing a chasseur and two Zouaves who sought to deter him.

Through the breach thus made he flew straight on, spurring his horse, and after him towards the wood fled the survivors of his band. At their heels fled Paul, and darted like an avenger upon Prieto. He whipped out a revolver and fired with his left hand, while in his right he flourished a sword.

“A word with you, lieutenant,” he said. Involuntarily, Prieto obeyed and stood to

one side. The last guerilla ran by him and disappeared in the wood.

“Good!” exclaimed Paul. “We are met on equal ground. Take your sword and defend yourself.”

They fought long. Paul had disarmed the Mexican and thrown away his own sword. They were joined hand to hand, and Paul had conquered, throwing the Mexican down, and preparing to bind him with his scarf. But he did not see an agile figure creep out of the wood behind him and aim a pistol at his head. The bullet struck him and sent him leaping above the prostrate traitor. His assassin, who had already turned to fly, looked over his shoulder and saw the murdered man's face. He stopped and ran back to where his victim lay.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE HACIENDA.

IT was night, and Paul lay upon a rough couch in a chamber of the hacienda, slowly returning to life. He never forgot the stages of that journey. With the first rays of consciousness he saw that he was climbing out of an abyss with trembling limbs and weak hands; a firm grasp seized and drew him out of the crater, leading him down its desolate waste into a valley of soft forgetfulness, whence he slowly made his way up the other slope to health. As he wound up the carpeted hill, it seemed to him that he was not alone — by his side walked Isidra, holding his hand. Everything was clear between them; he had looked into the depths of her eyes and knew

she held him guiltless of her father's fate. None but happy thoughts climbed with them, for, inspired by her companionship, and the delicious, health-bestowing air, he was picturing a beautiful life to be spent together, and she was listening with a blissful smile. At length, he thought they reached a lovely nest hollowed out of the hill and hidden from the sun by nodding flowers and leaves. Still holding her dear hand, he threw himself, weary indeed, but wonderfully happy, at her feet.

Opening his eyes, Paul was not surprised to find her, in very truth, beside him. He put out a weak hand, and drew her to his side.

“The flowers and the grass make a bower for you, my love.”

But there were no flowers, and the couch he lay upon was a rude construction of boards, draped by a dingy cloak.

“Where are we?” Paul asked. “Whither have we come?”

“Paul,” she said, in a whisper, “it is I—Isidra!”

“As if I did not know!” he answered. “But tell me, where are we? The battle—I was shot—have they taken Prieto?”

“Not him, but his chief, Ramirez.”

“He is a brave man. I am sorry for him. I would like to set him free.”

“He shot you, Paul! You hate the hand that wounded you?”

Her voice sounded like a cry.

“So it was he! He is brave. You must not hate him, Isidra. When you are with me, I hate no man.”

“Oh, I hate him! I hate him!”

The windowless chamber would have been shrouded in darkness but for a splendid moon that filled the court-yard of the hacienda with day-power radiance, and sent a broad shaft of light through the open space over the door. It fell upon Isidra and clothed her in a silver robe. She sat close

by his bedside, her hands clasped rigidly, and on her face an expression of imploring appeal. She sat silent, or knelt down by the bed and prayed, but, sitting or kneeling, her lips moved soundlessly in a stream of supplication. To Paul's eyes, often dimmed in weakness as his wound troubled him, she faded at times, like a melting figure — a creature of the moonlight. It was not easy for Paul to divide his conscious moments from his dreaming, only now he felt warmer and more palpable in his the clasp of her soft, strong hand.

And yet in his mind facts were struggling to arrange themselves in sequence.

Paul spoke again, this time to himself: "She was the guest of this house; that explains my unsuccessful search in Morelia. All these weary weeks, and, while the battle was fighting, she was in the hacienda. Oh, had I known it, I could have fought with tenfold energy!"

"But you fought bravely, Paul."

“Did you see the Liberal chief Ramirez? He is a gallant soldier!”

Isidra drew her hand away sharply. The action disturbed the patient, and he uttered a little moan of pain. Swift as a bird, Isidra hovered over him, easing the bandage, dropping a cooling dew on his burning wound, smoothing his hair with tender, agile fingers, and sighing forth a thousand pitying words. Strength revived in Paul at the kiss of her warm breath. He opened his eyes, murmuring:—

“I thought I had lost you, beloved!”

She drew back a little, but he still clasped her hand, and went on:—

“Oh, the lost days, the lost days, my Pepita, when I could not find you, when I ran about wildly in the search, hoping, yet fearing! What kept you always silent, during those dreary days? It was cruel of you, Isidra. Have not I already told you? I will say to you again that every power of mine was used to save your fath-

er's life — yours and mine also. Would you complain that I did not go myself, but sent Prieto to rescue him, I can only answer that I acted in honor. After I left the farm-house, on that bright day when you confessed you loved me, word was brought to me of an atrocious murder of a diligence-load of French soldiers, by the guerillas, who were headed towards San Juan. I hesitated between love and duty, but the recollection of your words nerved me to the latter. I scoured the country for the bandits, but did not find them, and then rode, without resting, to Morelia. Man has never endured bitterer agony than mine when I came too late to Morelia on that awful morning. But, besides my letter to the general in command, begging him to stay the execution, I wrote to you, explaining all this. Why have you never answered it?"

"I had no letter," Isidra said.

"By Prieto?"

“Never! never!”

“As I feared,” said Paul; “the letters were not delivered. The traitor is plain, now. Prieto owes me a thousand deaths.”

“You gave the letters to Prieto?”

“Yes.”

Isidra rose and walked towards the door.

Paul let her go, thinking she went to pray for the soul of her father. In the black shadow she threw herself upon the floor. A great remorse, a cruel remorse, cut into her heart, like the sharp point of a dagger, hurting her so cruelly that she uttered a muffled groan, heard only by herself. She bit her lips and drove the nails into her palms to keep from shrieking outright. O God! to hear this now — now, when her cup of bitterness already ran over. Her heart was shaken by awful sobs, but she choked them back, not to disturb the sick man on his bed. In her mute grief, Isidra recalled that happy moment when her heart first told her that

she loved him. The recollection filled her soul with more despair. She bowed her head upon the floor—she longed to dash it against the stones. Then she turned savagely upon herself. “All I have done is worse than vain,” she muttered, under her breath, and she beat her breast with her clenched hand, and tore her hair from its fastenings. At length, tears flowed, and drowned the violence of her self-anger.

But she could not go back to the bedside. When she said to herself that she had wrought in vain, pictures of her life passed before her in procession. She gazed upon them in odd apathy, as if they concerned another than Isidra. She pursued herself through her career; facts became jewels; her dreams the stuff of the dust-heap. Thus, as she knelt on the floor, with her head clasped tight in her hands, she saw a series of portraits, colored falsely, if brilliantly, by romantic fanta-

sies, educational perversities, self-delusions; and pouring fiercely on those pictures a red light from a wound—the wound of Paul! She had seen wounds before, she had seen scarred and disfigured bodies; but this one roused all the horror in her nature. His wound was the fortune of war. What was war? Oh, Mother of God! could not the world get along without war? Could not Mexico free herself by other means, or was not slavery preferable to extinction? What would it gain for a country to wound men like this one, when the end must be exhaustion of her sons, and death, by grief, of her daughters? The women were the ones who suffered by war—no revenge could bring to life again their slain fathers and brothers. Alas! she knew that—Isidra knew that—her own father and brother were avenged, but at what cost, O God!

She knew, too late, what war meant! How could she have ever loved it? Yet

she had. From its first impression on her dawning mind, from her first dream of glorious battle, war had worn a noble shape, that became nobler and loftier as the vague forms of her fancy grew with the growth of her body. Then she had sighed because she was a woman; she had burned to wear lance and sabre; she had dreamed a manlike dream. Impatience shook her because she must wage battle with ringing words and flashing eyes and not with steel and powder.

Those girlish dreams had become as much realities as dreams ever do. It was not long before she had her wish, and knew soldiers, banners, sieges, and battles. She had been in the thick of it, and no longer required imagination to construct war out of poetry and story. The fanciful stage became the real theatre where the drama of war unfolded its prosaic situations. How she loathed it all now! How dread the difference between the real and

the imagined ! She saw again the horrid fields, strewn with carnage, and shuddered to think that on those fields her eyes had sparkled, her voice had hoarsely shouted, her body had been nerved by a strange strength.

Was it truly she ? To think of these things now stopped her heart.

Apathy gave place to penitence, and tears fell, dropping on a carmine stain. Fantasies and delusions, lies and self-deceptions, all seemed to fade away and mingle with the beams of the moon that measured her life by this night's journey. Tranquilly, at last, Isidra saw them sink slowly and quietly into the irrevocable past.

She knelt down and fervently prayed. When she returned to the couch, the straining rigidity had passed away from her face. A glowing light in her eyes turned first towards the bed and then illuminated a hope in her own mind. The

moonlight shone full upon her face when Paul looked at her. How pure she looked!

"I have a confession to make," she said.

"It grieves me only that I am forced to speak darkly. Listen to me, Paul; remember my words, that they may return and plead for me when it becomes necessary to plead for your love."

Paul began to speak, but she continued: "Do not interrupt me. What I have to say must be told. You have not forgotten, when I expatriated myself because I loved you, how I swore to be faithful to you as a noble patriot to his father-land? Paul, I have been a traitor!"

"I absolve you," he said.

"When I saw my father die — shot before my eyes, I tried to pluck at the love in my heart, to tear it out and trample upon it. Like a serpent that had warmed itself there, I sought to destroy it.

Then I remembered nothing of all you had said to me — then I would listen to no defence argued for you by my heart — then I saw only your triumph over a vain woman who sought to compel you to her ends, but you were wise and learned in the ways of women — you routed me and made me a prisoner instead. The shame I blushed for then, when I knew that I loved you, and love opened my eyes to my unwomanliness, that shame came back in a resistless tide. I was swept upon it, clinging to the paltry spar of your promise to save my father. I could not forgive a broken promise.”

“Why talk of what distresses you?” said Paul. “Nature was too strong for us. Alas, my Pepita, this war has been cruel to you. No wonder your face is wan, your eyes veiled by a strange duskiness. I could weep to mark the change, but that I know the bloom will come back to your cheek, when another land holds out to

you the sweet invitation of youth, the consummation of life. Life is not over for us, Isidra."

"My life has been a lie — all a lie," she burst out. "And only now I know the truth. You wished to save my father's life, you loved me. Oh, I have been mad!"

For the first time, Isidra burst into passionate weeping.

Reaching out protecting arms, Paul took her to his breast, kissing the tear-stained cheeks, soothing her with tender words. She made no resistance, but lay there panting and trembling, and her sobs grew shorter as she listened to his voice.

"We will go," he said, "from this distracted country to a land of peace, far away across the sea. Not to my own country, for I have been absent from it too long to call France my native country. Like you, my poor little one, I have no home. But we will make one, and, wher-

ever we go, so we go together, there will be our native land. And oh! if I am your native land and your home, I will pray devoutly to the Virgin to make me worthy of your patriotism. Look up, Isidra! I remember a calm valley, where mountains rise blue and solemn about it, as in your own beautiful Morelia, and thither we will go, and there make our home. There we will build a cottage near a charming lake, and it shall be so pretty and so full of love that the birds will forsake their nests to come and dwell in it along with us. I will plough the fields and beat the waters; you, my Isidra, may bind roses and honeysuckle, and you shall hold a needle in your hand when we sit together at sunset on the threshold of our home."

At the last words, Isidra drew back with a bitter cry, and held her hand up in the moonlight, eying it disdainfully, and casting it away from her with a scornful gesture. Paul looked on in hurt amazement,

but she gave him no time to question, for, summoning up resolution, she resumed, in a hard, forced tone, as if there had been no interruption:—

“But I owed it to my name to make the false lover suffer—my father’s eyes sought and found me among the dense crowd in the alameda, and exacted a vow from me to avenge his death. My brother, too—my innocent brother!—tore the last roots of that infatuation out of my heart with his straining eyes. I fled from Morelia, crazed and maddened, going I knew not where nor for what. When I came to myself, I had forgotten all the ties that connected us, save two—your dishonored vow, and mine, which should be kept. How can I tell you how I kept it? I love you too well to tell you; I pray you may never know.”

“I do not wish to know. I trust you fully,” said Paul; “say no more.”

“There is more,” she went on. “My

father, before you knew me, was governor of Michoacan; a stern, unyielding man, who recked little how much human blood he spilt, if only he gained his ends. But they were noble ends; he was a patriot, and Mexico lay nearer his heart than his own children. He was wise and great, but cold and insensible to suffering in himself and others. All the state of Michoacan he would have willingly laid waste sooner than see it fall under foreign domination. Except that he doubted his true Creole faith, Juarez, with whom he concerted, honored him with fullest confidence. But the people, who were slothful and desirous first for peace, which they might have for unresisted oppression, hated my father for a tyrant, and, in one of their aimless revolutions, overthrew him. They forgot his virtues quickly, but they long remembered their smoking huts and their butchered sons and brothers. They had no faith in the patriotism of the hated Spaniard, Señor

Querraro. He was thrown into prison at the first rumor that the allied forces had landed. A little later, his liberty was restored, but with the warning that, at the first movement to recover power or upset existing institutions, he would suffer the extremest punishment. He returned home and shut himself up there with his daughter and his son. Shut himself up, but not to sleep — nay, his intrigues were only begun. Only this time he silenced his own footsteps, and made his children walk. To him came emissaries from Chihuahua, where the Indian President had retired, and through them he took measures, drew plans, wrote State papers, and plotted deeply to overthrow the Intervention. Never in person — no! he would not see these spies himself, but transmitted his authority to his daughter. It was she who admitted those evil-browed men to the house and garden, she who talked and advised with them, until she became as

deeply involved in the nets of politics as her father himself.

“ Oh, believe me, I am not complaining. I, who loved and revered my father as a god, I gloried in the work—the lofty hope of freeing Mexico took entire possession of my soul. But a change was to come. I met you, and you made me love you. I was glad to love you—I became happy. The noble thoughts that had filled me gave place sweetly to love. It seemed to me that my education in the rough school of war had prepared me to be your—a soldier’s wife. Alas, how mistaken I was! One look from my dying parent revived the drooping flowers of patriotism and sacrifice. Vengeance instantly swayed me—madness, if you will—but I could never have loved you aright if I had weakly sat me down and bewailed his death.

“ That madness has led me farther than I dare to look. But now at this hour it sets me free. I love you now. I am content.

“If you have need ever to remember it, Paul, think of what I have told you, as an excuse for my strange career — remember the harsh school of life which tutored me; remember the fearful foes — love and remorse — who warred to possess me; and do not forget that love was master at last,”

Paul listened, puzzled but sympathetic. There was a ring of tragedy in that rich voice, which, in his weak condition, moved him to tears. He would have risen if he could, and drawn her back again into his arms. But she had approached the door while speaking the last words, and now stood with her hand upon the latch. There she turned and said in a still voice: —

“Farewell, Paul!”

“Not farewell! Au revoir! Tell me I shall see you to-morrow!”

But she had closed the door behind her, and the echo of his own words was his answer.

CHAPTER XI.

ISIDRA.

THE morning sun drove away Paul's forebodings along with the shades of night. He felt stronger, and his heart became light and joyous. He waited impatiently for Isidra to come again. There was no sign of her — no light footstep, no rustle of garments. Outside in the court-yard the heavy foot of a trooper fell upon the flags with ringing echoes. Paul said to the quartermaster who was in and out of his chamber, looking after his comfort: —

“Go to the Señorita and beg her to come to me.”

“The Señorita?” questioned the sub-officer, who thought his captain's mind was wandering.

"You can send the message to the quarters of the proprietor," continued Paul.

"Ah! why, he is waiting outside, desperate to see you. All day yesterday he haunted the hacienda, and sent in message upon message which were not delivered."

"Whom do you mean?" said Paul.

"Whom but the proprietor? But he is a suspicious one, Monsieur! He possesses a paper from the Commandant of Morelia, and showed it to Monsieur the Adjutant yesterday, but the latter refused to disturb you. This morning his nervousness increases. He walks back and forth like a coyote. He says you will never regret giving him an interview. He wears a cloak thrown about his shoulders, but one can see how he trembles beneath it."

"Where is he now?" asked Paul, turning himself on the couch.

"Just outside in the court-yard."

"Let him come in."

"We suspect that he is not what he pretends," persisted the quartermaster.

"Well, you may remain within call in the portico, and hand me my pistols before you go."

The stranger entered with a hurried step. Inside the threshold he stopped until the quartermaster had left the room, shutting the door behind him. Then he advanced and threw back his cloak. It was Prieto.

"So, lieutenant! You are the master of this country-house?" said d'Amyot, quietly.

"Yes, it is I, my captain," the man returned doggedly.

"You are bold, Prieto, to trust yourself to me. What will you gain by it? In the wood I gave you a last chance for life. Your chief shot me like a coward from behind, and you escaped. But I have you both now."

"Yes, you have Ramirez and Prieto.

The first was captured because he shot before he knew your identity — ”

“Captured trying to steal my equipments, you would say. Don’t try to make a hero of your chief, Prieto. He is a thief, like the rest. Chinacos, Liberals, Juaristas, whatever fine names you give yourselves, you deserve only one title — bandits ! ”

“Please yourself, my captain ; you have captured Ramirez, it is true, but Prieto gives himself up.”

“And what is his motive for surrendering ? Come, lieutenant, tell me, in as few words as possible, what it is you wish.”

“Your prisoner, captain ; give me Ramirez. I beg for his life on my knees. I offer my own life instead. The court-martial is sitting this minute, and they will sentence him to be shot. Be noble, my captain, set him free, and execute me in his place ! ”

Prieto sank upon his knees and held out his hands with an imploring gesture. His

voice shook, and two great tears coursed down his cheeks.

In spite of himself, Paul was moved at sight of this emotion. It seemed unfeigned. Then he laughed scornfully.

“Get up, Prieto!” he exclaimed. “Have you turned foolish? Or do you think that I have? Free my prisoner — release that Ramirez, whom it has cost so much blood to capture! Pshaw! you came here to tell me something very different. Get up and say what you mean!”

“Ah, my captain, I implore you! Take me instead. I am the man who has injured you. What has he done that you should thirst for his life? It is I who deceived and betrayed you. I am the spy. Shoot me down like one.”

“All in good time, Prieto. I will try to gratify you if death is what you wish — but Ramirez shall suffer for his sins.”

“Then listen, Paul d’Amyot. You will commit a crime!”

"It is useless to threaten," the other said, calmly. "I am armed."

But calming himself in an instant, and giving his words an earnest, persuasive tone, Prieto added : —

"Have you forgotten how I labored for the troops in San Juan, and used every means to prevent their disaffection? Have you forgotten how in Morelia I nursed and tended you back to health, gratifying your least wish and seeking eagerly to lighten the tedium of inaction? And oh! my captain, have you forgotten how I carried you on my back over the barricade of Puebla, when you told me I had saved your life, and you would always owe me a debt of gratitude?"

"Treachery wipes out everything, Prieto."

"And are you sure that I have been a traitor? Listen to me, Captain d'Amyot; you know that I am a Mexican, and one-

half of my people believe your troops to be enemies. What has Heaven confided to me at birth except the love of my country? and if all I have done was done for Mexico, by what right do you call me a traitor? I have not always served my country with honor, God knows, and you will know it also if you will permit me to tell my story, but you will perceive that in these last years I have labored to efface the faults of my youth. Will you hear me, caballero?"

"Go on, Prieto, with whatever you have to say. Only, no lies! or no more lies than are necessary."

The Mexican did not appear to hear these words. He sat down near the foot of the couch, and began to speak rapidly.

"You have never asked me who I was nor betrayed any curiosity about my life before we met. What I tell you without questioning, I tell you without whitening. I was born near this very place, in Soledad.

My mother was an Indian woman, my father a padre. That is to say, Monsieur, I had neither father nor mother. How I grew up, how I lived and with whom, it is hardly necessary to explain—you will imagine that my youth was a hard one and a bad one. It could be nothing else. Well, I pass over that, and come to my twentieth year. I was wiry and strong, and skilled in the knowledge of the mountains—a man to make a valuable recruit to a band of robbers. I knew them all—all the ladrones who infested the mountains of Michoacan—they had shown me kindness when I was a chico, and it took little argument to persuade me to join them. For what had an honest life to offer me, Monsieur? in the fields I could work along with the Indians, those sad and patient peasants whom you have seen going to their day's work, a slave of the proprietor, never out of debt to his tienda;—in the towns I could become a lepero, and sleep in the

dirt, and rob and cheat. Either existence was insupportable to me. Despite my yellow skin, proud blood flows in my veins, and the free existence of a ladrone seemed more honorable than the hopeless life of an ill-paid farm-servant. I do not tell you this, Monsieur, to excuse my turning robber, but to suggest to your mind my condition. I was untaught, and could not weigh the right and wrong of the matter. I was dominated by instinct. My blood boiled at work and slavery, but I could not starve. On the other hand, I loved freedom, I was a child of the mountains, and to take by force appeared to be the natural life of a man. So I joined a band of freebooters, and was not long in becoming a leading spirit among them. From the first, my companions received and treated me well; they even showed me marks of consideration. The reason for that was because I knew the mountains like an open plain, every retreat and fastness, every gorge and

pass ; and they rejoiced in possessing a sure guide. Too ignorant to feel remorse, I was perfectly happy.

“ Ah ! gay times had we at periods of festival, when we mixed with other men or rode into poor villages, enriching the starving inhabitants with our spoil ! For we were good to the poor, Monsieur, and Mexico contains many suffering people. And on the road it was not always the grim side of robbery that we saw. There were gay caballeros in those days, who were pleased to toss down their purses and contend amicably with the bandits to see who should possess them. Many a purse of gold have I won by the fleetness of my horse.

“ In associating with these caballeros and with our captives, I learned, by contrast, what an ignorant, despicable wretch I was, and never rested until I had been taught to read. Then my mode of life appeared odious in my eyes. I longed to change it—to become an honest man ; even the Indians,

who toiled so patiently in the fields, and whom I had formerly counted no better than their animals, seemed happier than I. I envied their calm life, their freedom from the pangs of covetousness, their fearlessness of punishment; for when I began to perceive that I was a law-breaker, the fear of death pursued me night and day. Will you believe it, Monsieur? after these ideas began to dawn in my brain, I grew more fierce and savage than I had been before. It was just about this time that I killed a man — an exploit that lay heavy on my conscience. I had been two years in the service, but in all that time chance had kept my hands unstained with blood. With that first murder my nature changed. I robbed more audaciously, I committed atrocities that once I would have shuddered to do, — I became cruel and barbarous in proportion as knowledge and remorse gnawed at my vitals. From being known as a gallant, chivalrous freebooter and a

kind and tender heart, I was feared and hated even by the natives whom I succored. Once they would have rescued me from the soldiers at the expense of their lives, but now they were only kept by fear from putting the avengers on my track. A word or denial from one of them was enough for me—I needed no more to plunge a knife in the heart. The country round about here, and particularly the mountain-passes, were covered with crosses that marked the murders of my victims.

“I was by this time chief of the band, and I ruled them with an iron hand. Scarcely a week passed without a dispute which ended in the death of one of my brigands, until they began to murmur, and I knew that a slight cause would be sufficient to raise them against me and result in my destruction. But not even the fear of death could restrain me. I was like a man who had dyed himself in blood, and would

cleanse himself with blood and yet more blood. At length — ”

“Enough of this, Prieto !” exclaimed Captain d’Amyot, with a gesture of loathing. “What you tell me is horrible. I cannot understand your purpose.”

“Hear me out, Monsieur. I have a purpose, and the story is not much longer. At length, after I had escaped many skillfully laid traps to capture me, one of my bandits, a slippery fellow, whom I had often threatened, betrayed me into the hands of the governor of Morelia. That was a year before the Intervention, and the governor, a wise man and a devoted patriot, was taking the noblest measures to pacify Michoacan. To my followers he offered amnesty and service in his own body-guard, and to all the bands who infested the mountains that surround his state he held out overtures of pardon if they would use arms in defence of their country. All Mexicans are not patriots,

Monsieur, but the bandits of Mexico love liberty, and many among them had been driven to the mountains by persecution. The majority of the bandits gladly took him at his word. As I said, to my betrayer and to my band he promised pardon if they would serve with him; but to me, who had been justly represented as a hardened criminal, he feared to extend mercy. I was to be made a conspicuous example, and executed publicly, to encourage the others. Not a man among my followers spoke a word for me in extenuation or defence. Without being able to console myself that I was no worse than the others, I turned sullen and morose, and I waited the execution of my sentence doggedly. I was confined in the prison at Morelia, — the same that adjoins the great cathedral, — and a priest came daily to minister to my soul. I scoffed at him and bade him go to the robbers who kept gold in their pouches; mine was empty, and I

could not buy *Padres* and *Ave Marias*. One day he came as usual, but not alone ; a Señorita accompanied him, who wore the garb of a novice. She spoke to me in a gentle voice, a voice that reminded me of the evening breeze singing among my mountain-pines. She besought me to confess, and receive the consolations of the Church. I was weeping before she had finished, and I covered my face with my hands when I told her the story of my hard youth. As I spoke, and said nothing but the truth, she wept also.

“At the sight of her tears, my heart gave a great leap and then stood still. The fangs of remorse, that for years had clinched it, were relaxed, and, throwing myself on the ground, I begged her to let me kiss the edge of a filmy veil that floated over her garments. She placed her hand upon my head, just here, Monsieur, and bade me listen to the priest, and then she left my cell.

“Next day she came again, and brought me hope and courage. This time she spoke of Mexico. Ah, she was a patriot, Monsieur, she lived for Mexico! She was proud to deny everything for her country. She was not afraid to violate the hard customs that are raised like a stone wall about an unmarried girl, nor to break them down and overstep the *débris*, to mingle in actions that are purely masculine; she was not afraid to take an active part in the dangerous game of politics, to enter into a conspiracy, to raise her own arm for the triumph of her cause, to put her life or her liberty at stake for freeing Mexico. It was beautiful to see her eyes shine when she spoke of the future of her country, but, alas! they were dimmed by tears, the next moment, when she remembered that her native land was menaced by enemies — within, by her own slothful, misguided people; without, by covetous, hungry foreigners. She told me our

country's history, and recited in eloquent words the immortal deeds of Hidalgo. It was her purpose, Monsieur, to rouse an equal enthusiasm in me; but she had no need to work so hard. I was an eager disciple; what she taught, I learned; what she thought, I thought; what she willed, I willed; what she loved, I loved, and much more than she, who was utterly unselfish. She loved not herself, but I loved her!

“Yes, I, the hardened criminal, — the cruel bandit, — the boy begotten by a recreant priest and an Indian mother, — I loved this high-born lady, who only looked upon me with pitying, proselytizing eyes.

“I never told her, Monsieur, I could never dare to tell her, but I think she divined it, and, in consequence, she treated me with tender confidence. It was not long before I was set free, for I ought to have told you that she was the daughter of the governor, and she took me home with

her from prison — secreting me from the eyes of enemies and babblers, and teaching me the difficult rôle I must play. How eagerly I embraced it, how hard I strove to learn! It was she who taught me your language, — the French, — and she made me proficient in many things besides. I was to be an agent in her hands, and she neglected nothing that could educate me into a valuable one. For the clear eyes of these two enemies of the Intervention, the governor of Morelia and his daughter, were anxiously scanning the horizon, and the plans of the usurper were quickly foreseen, and, as far as possible, forestalled, by them. I was sent to Juarez, time and again, with important missions, and I hurried with hand and heart to conclude them and return to my dear mentor. But upon one of these journeys, a letter in the governor's handwriting was handed me in Mexico City. It said that he was thrown into prison by the infatuated people, but

they had no proofs against him, and he must soon be set at liberty. Meantime, I was to proceed to the coast, and attach myself, in any capacity, to the French army. My knowledge of the language would make me useful as interpreter between them and the Mexicans. Needless to say, I disobeyed him. I trembled for the safety of the daughter if the father was lodged in prison. I returned to Morelia, and, without making myself known, I saw her. Her father had been liberated, and I was ashamed to show my misplaced zeal. Therefore, I set out to join the invaders, and you know, my captain, that we became acquainted at Puebla. From that moment I served two masters—you with assistance and counsel which events permitted me to use honestly, without damage to the Liberal cause, but her with the fullest intelligence I could glean of the movements of the French forces. I am not ashamed to own myself a spy—I

glory in it. The Señorita has made a true patriot of me. I am willing to die for my country. Now that you have heard my story, you will grant that what I have done is fair in war. I have not betrayed my master—I am no traitor. I appeal to your sense of justice—take my life—let Ramirez go, and I pledge you my honor that he will quietly leave the country.”

“You offer a valuable security.”

“Nothing that I have said has moved you? Then, I have more to tell. What I have done I did for a woman. Need I tell you who she is? My benefactress, my savior, she for whom I have risked life and honor—she is the Señorita Isidra. You love her, Señor! I know you love her. Grant my prayer for her sake!”

“Now, Prieto, your lies pass all patience! You swear you have done these things for her. You lie in your throat! It was she, was it, who com-

manded you to destroy the letter to the Marshal Commandant, which would have delayed, perhaps revoked, her father's execution? I accuse you of murdering her father and brother. I might forgive you for stealing my Zouaves and nearly accomplishing the ruin of my army, but for that other treachery I will make you eat your heart."

"What would you have?" cried Prieto, fiercely. "You were my rival, and I had a right to use any means to remove you out of my path. But let that pass; the way for me to win her is not yet closed, but I close it with my own hand. A dead lover need not be feared. See, I immolate myself, and leave you free to act. Only give me the body of the guerilla chief, or promise that he shall go safe without questioning, and I will remain to suffer his punishment. She will never know that I destroyed the letters."

"You are mistaken, friend. The Señorita has been told."

Prieto's face was awful to see. "Body of God!" he screamed. "Who told her? How can she know?"

His eyes read Captain d'Amyot's face jealously. He turned away his head, and muttered in a thick voice, "*Ay, Dios mio!* she has seen him!"

After a pause he resumed:—

"I speak now as a man ready to die. I would like to die without doing more evil. I could do a good deed by speaking openly, but a sacred oath seals my lips. Attend to me solemnly. Grant what I ask and let me end an ignoble life nobly. Set Ramirez free, I supplicate you. Oh, as there are human feelings in your heart, as you love her who is most dear and sacred to you, set Ramirez free!"

"Bah! your persistence tires me," said Captain d'Amyot, impatiently.

"Remember then —"

"One thing," cried Paul, in a tone of fury, "I will remember, and I will never

forget, until I have seen your cowardly body riddled by a double platoon! — I will never forget that it was you who murdered her father.”

“So be it,” said Prieto, and leaned over the couch with a face so white that Paul’s stout heart quailed. But he attempted no violence, only repeating through his shut teeth, “So be it. Have your way. I ought to be satisfied to die without uttering another word, because by keeping my oath I condemn you to a punishment worse than death.”

“What do you mean?” Paul asked, incredulously. “How can you punish me?”

Even as he put the question, he saw the beautiful face of Isidra — her pitying eyes, her tender mouth, as she had appeared to him the night before. She loved him still, in spite of his broken promise, nay, she knew now that his promise had not been broken; Isidra loved him still, and she was

near him, in the same house, only a room or two between them. With her love and trust to envelop him, how could man or demon harm him? Paul smiled at the fierce words of the foiled bandit.

But Prieto — dark and hideous thoughts held sombre possession of his soul. If he spoke it would be his voice that would bring perfect happiness to this taunting rival. He had sworn to be silent. Well, he had but to be faithful to his oath, and surer despair than any human power could allay would fall upon and crush Paul d'Amyot. He threw his cloak about his shoulders, and turned moodily towards the door.

Meanwhile, Paul, in the softened mood that the bright image of Isidra had wrought in him, was meditating what disposition to make of the intruder. Isidra had been this man's benefactress, ties of friendship had once bound them. Was her lover's to be the hand to drag him to execution?

The entrance of the quartermaster solved

the question for him. That functionary came in breathless, and displaying great excitement.

“The court-martial has concluded Ramirez’ trial. That man appeared before the judges wrapped in his cloak even to the eyes. He refused to speak a word in his defence. Ah! captain, you were right; he is a dangerous man. It came out in the proceedings that last night he escaped from his cell. The guard was changed about eight o’clock, and at that hour he was in his place, but an hour later the adjutant, making his rounds, found the place empty. He hastily dispersed his men to every part of the hacienda. No result—the prisoner was nowhere! But when the soldiers returned to prod the walls of his cell with swords and lances, there sits Monsieur the bandit, wrapped in his cloak, dignified and morose as ever! We believe that man has commerce with the devil!”

“What was the sentence?” said Paul, interrupting the exclamatory speaker.

“Condemned! They have no hope to keep such a fiend in custody. He will be shot on the instant. This moment they are leading him to the front of the hacienda, where I go to observe and bring you particulars.”

“My God! this shall not be!” cried Prieto, flinging himself at Paul’s feet. “My oath is not sacred. O Señor, save her, I supplicate you! If you love her, you will be merciful. Save her, save Isidra!”

“Isidra!”

“Yes! yes! Blind fool that you did not see it. Ramirez is Isidra!”

Paul sank back with blanched lips upon his couch. “Isidra! Isidra!” he repeated. “Ramirez is Isidra!”

“Quick, your cloak! call back that officer. No, there is not time — lend me your hand. Oh, that you had spoken sooner!

help me to rise. Now, may Christ delay them!"

So speaking, Paul dashed from the room, taking no heed of his wound, and down the inclined way that led to the place of execution.

Outside, the air was strangely heavy and silent. The hot afternoon sun had just touched the top of the hill crowned by trees, and a great fringe of foliage melted indistinctly in its rays. The trees sent motionless shadows across the cleared space in front of the hacienda, shadows that seemed to stand still in sympathy with the pitiful quiet, which was unbroken by any cry sent up from the ravine by bird or beast. At the impending death of a maiden, nature's serenity appeared troubled, and the heavens seemed to be drawing that catching breath which precedes a shower of tears. Man was silent likewise; the Indians crouched, without motion, under the protection of their huts, and the soldiers,

grouped upon the walls, in attitudes of watching, had strained their ears to hear the orders of the adjutant who directed the execution, until they were deaf to the sound of their captain's flying feet.

Two hundred steps from the wood a platoon of soldiers were drawn up, and, ten paces in front of them, the condemned waited, fiercely calm. She had watched her father, she had seen her brother die; and their bearing had been an example for her own. Like them, she would die for her country.

But had she forgotten the man whom once she called her country? She trembled, and raised a manacled hand towards her quivering lips.

O delay not, cruel guns, but speed your bullets quickly, or this calm and resigned face will break into agonized weeping; delay not your fire, soldiers, or this woman will forget that she had ever been a man and performed a soldier's duty! Far bet-

ter so ! she can die now, secure in his love, he will never know that grief and despair drove her mad, unsexed her, and raised an insuperable barrier between them. Delay not your fire, soldiers, or this last thought will go away as a light is blown out, with a breath, and with it her last flicker of courage !

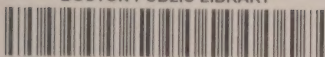
And she — did she hear his succoring feet ? Did she hear that shout ? A smile dawned on her praying lips. The fire of the platoon convulsed the air. Isidra fell upon the ground, face downward.







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